



Volume 29 No. 4 April 2001

FIREFIGHTER

Cuba

Si!



GENERAL SECRETARY

ON BALANCE IT MUST BE

BY THE time you read this, the General Election Campaign should be well under way.

Parliamentary Elections are an important part of the democratic process and their outcome can significantly influence the quality of life of FBU members at work and for their families. So I urge all members to use their votes on June 7 if, as is widely predicted, this is polling day.

This Election comes four years into a Labour Government, which followed 18 years of Tory rule. In a relatively short time, Tony Blair's Government has achieved much and introduced many measures to improve living standards and opportunities for working people and their families. Those who like me say, "well they could have done much more and done it faster", perhaps should concentrate on what appear to have been priorities, those needing a minimum wage or perhaps family tax credit. These have been after 20 or so years of Tory attacks on the people Labour have focused in on.

Of course there have been disappointments including the failure to repeal all the anti-union laws introduced by the Thatcher/Major Government and the apparently unquestioning support given to the United States foreign policy objectives. But on balance the record is pretty positive and compares very favourably with the Tory alternative.

Look at some of the measures in the March Budget:

- Child benefit increase – up to £15.50 a week for the first child and £10.35 for others.
- Children's Tax Credit introduced at £520 a year will benefit 4.5 million tax-paying families with children.
- Basic State Pension increased by £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples.

If we examine the overall situation we find that unemployment is down significantly, living standards have improved for most working people and State Pensions are now rising faster than average earnings.

After a slow start, money is now beginning to flow into the public services, particularly for the National Health Service and Education. Inflation is low, the minimum wage has been established and uprated (not by nearly enough – but it's a start) and real earnings have risen in each year of the Labour Government.

It is a good record – but it's far from perfect. In the Fire Service



some of the shortcomings are plain to see. Too often Labour Councils are seen to be cutting resources and threatening our conditions instead of looking for constructive dialogue with the workforce and the Union to find an agreed way forward towards a better service for the public provided in an efficient way.

We all know that the next Government will be formed by a Labour or Tory majority and the reality is that even where Labour's performance falls short of our expectations, the Tories promise to be far less understanding of the needs of the public services. The signs are that Labour has learnt from the mistakes made in their first two years of Government when public spending was unnecessarily restrained and Local Authorities continued to be inadequately funded.

Now Labour promises a year on year increase in spending on essential Services and State Pensions to gradually repair the damage done in the Thatcher/Major years. The Tory alternative is to undercut Labour's plans by £16,000m a year which can only mean a threat to jobs, earnings and working conditions for all in the Fire Service. Years of bitter experience tell us that the Tories, if given a chance, will be less disposed to uprate Child Benefit, State Pensions, Working Family Tax Credits and the Minimum Wage.

Whichever Party wins a majority the FBU will seek to work constructively with the resultant Government in the interests of the members. We have not always agreed with the Labour Government



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LABOUR

and some of our sharpest quarrels have been with Labour Local Authorities. But we have made progress over the last four years and I feel confident that the next Labour Government will do much more to advance working peoples' interests. Without our affiliation and the ability to influence, we would be reduced to a 'cash for questions' approach, which is both dishonest and lacking in political integrity. The FBU will continue to fight on behalf of all workers and campaign to ensure 'any' Labour Government makes real the aspirations of those workers.

JUSTICE FOR COLOMBIAN PEOPLE

Every year the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions produces a survey of violations of union rights around the world. In recent years Colombia has been by far the worse transgressor.

Sometimes it is not easy being a Trade Union activist in Britain – being a representative for fellow workers can bring problems and headaches. But in Colombia last year 69 trade unionists were murdered often by agents of the Government or big employers, simply because they were carrying out their responsibilities to fellow workers. A further 676 received death threats. Despite this situation a comrade trade unionist has accepted an invitation to our Annual Conference to explain their problems and real fears for literally survival.

To put all this in perspective the trade union movement in Colombia is only 5 per cent of the size of the British TUC – so the comparative figure for our country would be over 1,000 murdered trade unionists every year.

This is a horrific situation. It is being taken up by the International Labour Organisation, part of the United Nations and by national trade union centres around the world. Our Brothers and Sisters in this small South American country need our help to establish the basic human right to life and to carry out trade union activities. For these reasons the FBU has joined with other British Unions and the TUC as part of a Justice for Colombia Campaign.

Members who want more information on this vitally important Campaign should write to me at Head Office. Remember that some of the same huge international companies, which turn a blind eye to tyranny and brutality in Colombia, also operate in Britain. In today's globalised economy an injury to one really is an injury to all!



COVER: Alicia Gonzales Gutierrez from the Federation of Cuban Women speaking at the Women's TUC in March. Alicia was the first Cuban ever to speak from a TUC Conference platform.

A full report of the Women's TUC will be in the next edition of Firefighter.



FBU CONFIDENTIAL FREEPHONE HELPLINE

0 8 0 0 7 8 3 4 7 7 8

FAIRNESS AT WORK is about treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves – with respect

BERKSHIRE CAMPAIGN

81% vote for action

FBU members of Berkshire Brigade have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action over a proposed reorganisation of the crewing of special appliances and ongoing personnel shortfalls with an 81% yes vote.

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: "This overwhelming result is vindication of the strength of feelings of our members in the Berkshire Brigade over these issues. Our members have shown that they will no longer tolerate the way in which the Brigade is being managed.

"These issues of course have an impact on our members' conditions, but crucially, our members feel that if these proposals had gone ahead, then members of the public would also certainly be at risk."

Lincoln Ball Berkshire Brigade Secretary

IF IN October 2000 you were to have asked the 500 members in Royal Berkshire whether they were prepared to strike over a proposed reorganisation of the crewing of special appliances and ongoing personnel shortfalls, the majority response would have been NO.

Why should firefighters in leafy Windsor or rural Newbury consider such proposals? A nine-month Best Value review had been completed which recommended the loss of 24 station based jobs with the 're-investment' of 12 posts as an operational management and training reserve. A net of 12 station posts being lost, an increase in switch (alternate or jump) crewing of special appliances and a £ 200,000 saving to the budget; Oh and a public statement that the service would be better.

FBU members were not happy and the message coming back to Brigade Committee was that 'the FBU should do something'. A series of Branch meetings were called where Brigade Officials gave prepared OHP presentations on likely future crewing and service problems due to the changes. The membership was subtly reminded of who the FBU was, if the FBU were to do 'something' about it then ultimately the Brigade Committee may be coming back to the membership.



The Chief Fire Officer then sent his officers, mostly FBU members, around to give his spin on the proposals, also on OHP presentation. On the whole this first round of Brigade lectures was received openly by our membership.

The Brigade FBU Officials then embarked on a second series of visits to workplaces, but this time to watches and retained stations. During these visits, one of the FBU Officials would produce a crisp £20 note and place it on the mess table. The members would then discuss the proposals: what would happen if the Fire Authority passed the proposals, what the Fire Brigades Union would or could do about it. The Official then proposed that we could do one of two things – we could continue the challenge or each one of us could save ourselves 12 of those £20 notes a year because that's how much the union was costing us. Don't send your Officials into the ring, the message went, without holding hands around that ring to make the fight fair and balanced.

As fate would have it a few days prior to the Fire Authority meeting there was a large fire at an old brewery in Reading Town Centre. It proved difficult getting special appliances to the incident. If the proposed changes had been implemented, over half of Berkshire's crews would have been committed to that one incident due to the effect of switch-crewing. Politicians and the media were briefed by the FBU Officials prior to the Fire Authority meeting.

To no avail however, the seemingly inevitable happened and the Fire Authority passed the proposals with some amendments which would hopefully appease FBU members. Four of the post losses were reinstated and the Rescue Boat was saved (all against what the Best Value report had already proposed as Best Value). The savings had now been reduced from £200,000 to £42,000. A net of eight station-based posts (less two in community fire safety) were still proposed to be lost however. There was still a failure to

recognise the continuing personnel shortfalls. One Labour member voted against with the rest abstaining. Then, on the budget as a whole, the entire Labour Group voted against but were defeated.

The FBU immediately called a mass meeting of its membership for 24 January, to be attended by our General Secretary. The mass meeting was a huge success. Over 80 per cent of the off-duty membership turned up. Attempts were made by the Brigade to keep on-duty crews away from the meeting. One retained crew at Sonning had planned to cover a wholetime station ground to allow the wholetime crew to attend. Less than an hour before the meeting the plan was over-ruled by the Brigade on the basis that they would not pay the retained fees. The retained crew turned-out without pay however. Other pumps and specials were turned back en-route. It was a different story a year or so previously when the Brigade launched its Strategic Plan and Best Value policy. In 1999 several crews at a time were taken off their station grounds to attend these Brigade-led meetings.

At the mass meeting the membership was given three options:

- agree with the proposals and do nothing,
- disagree with the proposals and still do nothing or
- disagree and continue the challenge.

The membership were informed however that if we did nothing and the changes went ahead then members should just accept the changes and continuing shortages and not moan. If they did moan then don't moan to the FBU Officials because they won't be listening. Members were given ten days to make their minds up. The outcome, an overwhelming mandate to exhaust all avenues prior to the registration of a trade dispute and ultimately a ballot. Around 90 per cent of the wholetime membership were proposing a course of action they knew could lead to a ballot. The last time that happened in Berkshire – 1977 and the National Strike. On 7 February 2001, the Fire Authority were given until the end of February to sort out the situation and come to some agreement. Meetings were convened with the Fire Authority leaders but realistic offers were not forthcoming.

On 1 March the General Secretary registered an official dispute. This included both the proposals and the failure to address ongoing personnel shortfalls. The Authority did not even impose status quo to discuss the dispute. On 14 March therefore the General Secretary gave seven days notice of ballot. On that same day over 150 Berkshire members together with the General Secretary lobbied the Fire Authority meeting. The Authority response – an offer to go to ACAS.

We had not been afforded status quo and now, after we carried out the action we said we would, ACAS was introduced. The offer of ACAS was not rejected, we had not even discussed it with the Authority when the Chief Fire Officer wrote to every employee stating that the FBU had rejected the offer. On behalf of members the FBU were willing to continue talking but would, under no circumstances, halt the ballot – unless of course the terms of the dispute were met.

THANK YOU ALL

Dear Firefighter

On behalf of the membership of Royal Berkshire may this opportunity be taken to thank the following for their help and support during the current campaign and ballot within our Brigade.

EC Member Keith Handscomb visited our Executive in February to deliver a one-day crash course on tactics. Some good information was gained and also helped confirm we were on the correct course.

Sean Walsh who administered the hardship fund in Essex has handed over good instruction to our own members who have been standing-by ready to take over that responsibility. Officials in Merseyside including Neil Thompson have given good advice and further contacts to our Officials who visited on a one-day fact finding mission.

Graham Noakes and Jim Brown from Essex came to our Brigade Committee to tell of the tactics their Chief Fire Officer employed to demonise them and interfere with the ballot.

We have had excellent advice from Doug Christie at Thompsons who has geared the campaign to a legal footing and hopefully has not endured too many headaches from over-eager Berkshire Officials. Support from Head Office has been outstanding. The General Secretary has rallied our membership on two occasions; the Assistant General Secretary has given sound counsel on Section 19 procedures, Dave Patton and Geoff Ellis have visited our Brigade Committee and provided excellent advice and resources for the campaign. All the above are from outside our Region, but special gratitude must also go to our EC Member Steve Paine who visited Branch and Brigade Committees and in the process helped turn several members understanding of the issues into belief and conviction in our campaign.

Finally, I would like to thank our old Chief Fire Officer David Harper for helping our campaign by sending his officers out, mostly FBU members, several against their own better judgment, to say exactly the wrong things at exactly the right time. He even got an OBE in the middle of it all to go alongside his MVO for extinguishing the Windsor Castle fire. Outstanding. He can now be found inspecting South Western Brigades for Her Majesty.

We have had numerous messages of support but have not replied to all of them as yet. Those messages are certainly well received by the membership and have served to offer proof that Unity is Our Strength. The membership in Berkshire has learnt the worth of our National Union and during that lesson has gained confidence and hope in the future of industrial relations within our own Brigade. If it can happen in little Royal Berkshire it can happen anywhere.

Yours fraternally
Lincoln Ball, Brigade Secretary

REINSTATE MALCOLM PYE!



A scapegoat for years of mismanagement

Bob Pounder
Brigade Secretary GMC

SUPPORTING firefighters, colleagues, members of the public and the family of a sacked Sub Officer joined a lunchtime demonstration (right) on Friday March 16.

Malcolm Pye, a retained officer serving at Horwich fire station, lost his appeal to a disciplinary tribunal of the Fire Authority. The appeals tribunal upheld a previous decision in which he was 'required to resign'. He was charged with originating a fictitious fire call and subsequently making fraudulent claims for payment.

A police investigation into this matter saw the early morning arrests in March and September 1999 of 12 firefighters from Horwich. The police also closely examined statistical records. By December of that same year the Crown Prosecution Service declined to take any further action.

The Malcolm Pye story is an echo of a recent case in which the now reinstated headmistress, Marjorie Evans had been sacked by her school governing body when in fact there was 'no credible evidence', to support the allegations made against her (*Guardian* March 17, 2001).

Assisting the Fire Brigades Union in the disciplinary appeal were fire consultants and expert witnesses Mr Frank Morris (OOT) and Mr Mike Dennet (OOT). Both members were dismayed and astounded at the Fire Authority decision, which has now gone to appeal at the Home Office. "It is felt that the Home Office will overrule the Fire Authority and reinstate Malcolm because there is no direct or credible evidence to support the allegations," said Mr Morris. This is a view emphatically shared by Mr Dennet.

The Fire Brigades Union in Greater Manchester believes that Malcolm Pye is being made the scapegoat for the years of mismanagement of Horwich fire station. A post card campaign calling for the immediate re-instatement of Sub Officer Pye and an inquiry into the administration of the station over the past ten years is now under way.

Senior management and local councillors were due to attend a ceremony at the fire station in order to hand over a new fire appliance. The function was cancelled when Fire Brigades Union members expressed a preference for the company of their sacked colleague.



CONTROL CENTRES

Grampian Fire Board backs retention of dedicated control

Grampian Fire Board agreed at its meeting on the 31 March 2001 to:

- Actively pursue the retention of the current provision of a dedicated Control Centre to serve the specific local needs of Grampian Fire Brigade;
- Seek support from other Scottish Fire Brigades in maintaining the principle of locally managed mobilising and Control Centres; and that
- The Firemaster and Clerk of the Fire Board should contact other Scottish Fire Brigades to seek their support to retain Fire Brigade Command and Control facilities under their local control.

This was in response to recommendations from the Government in a report entitled *The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications* and comments from the Chief

Inspector of Fire Services relating to the report.

The report recommended that Emergency Fire Controls are merged with each other or with Police and Ambulance Controls, under the guise of "Best Value".

Speaking at the Scottish TUC Congress in Aberdeen FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: "The Fire Brigades Union applauds the decision taken by Grampian Fire Board to retain their own Independent Emergency Fire Control. We are clear that the proposals from the Home Office are purely about making cuts and are not about providing the best possible service for the public. The amount of money and resources a nation puts into its public services reflects the quality of that society. The Fire Brigades Union will always fight for decent public services and we thank Grampian Fire Board for their courageous stand against the Government."

Report the Board accepted

REASON FOR REPORT

To advise the Fire Board on the potential implications of a Report concerning Mobilising Control Centres undertaken in England and Wales.

To advise the Board of the comments of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services with regard to this Report as it may affect Grampian Fire Brigade.

CORPORATE STRATEGY

This Report has implications upon the Board's Corporate objectives; to respond, in accordance with statute to all emergency calls and; to mobilise and control all activities through a specialist communications network.

BACKGROUND

A report developed by consultants Mott McDonald has been prepared on behalf of the Home Office to consider future arrangements for the receipt and administration of emergency calls dealt with by the Fire Service titled "The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications". This study concluded that there were two options worthy of further consideration; the amalgamation of smaller Fire Brigade Mobilising Centres to form larger units and the possibility of joint/shared working facilities with other emergency services.

At a Scottish Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council meeting earlier last year, the Council agreed that Fire Authorities and the

Strategic Review Steering Group be asked to consider the implications for Scotland of the report and its recommendations.

HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services noted in his performance monitoring report of the Brigade undertaken in November 2000, that given the proposal to relocate the present Grampian Fire Brigade Headquarters, it was opportune to consider whether there were any significant issues to be addressed or Best Practice guidance could be implemented.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Report's conclusions and recommendations were developed on a basis of numbers of incidents attended by Fire Brigades, as opposed to the numbers of calls received by Fire Brigade Control Rooms. It is the view of the Fire Service Professional Associations, including the representative organisations, that the authors of the Report did not appreciate that a Fire Brigade Control Room receives many repeat calls in respect of a single incident and that each emergency call received has to be processed in exactly the same manner until it becomes known that any particular call relates to an incident to which the Brigade is already making an attendance. Appendix A identifies one such call with 18 repeat calls over a 14 minute timeframe. This omission on the Report author's part has a significant influence on the operations of a Fire Brigade Control Room.

It is on this basis that the principal considerations are deemed to be fundamentally flawed.

CONTROL CENTRES

The Report, as it has been produced, recommends that Fire Brigade Control Rooms which process less than 100,000 calls a year should be combined to provide a Fire Brigade Control Room which can deal with this number of calls. Effectively, this recommendation means that Scotland's eight Fire Brigades would be controlled by one such centre. The Report made a further recommendation that Fire Brigades which process 20,000 calls per year could justify their own command and control facility on the basis they were operating at more than 75 per cent of their optimum. Adoption of this recommendation would mean that only one and possibly a second Scottish Fire Brigade could justify their own command and control mobilising centre. On this basis, the remaining six Fire Brigades in Scotland being required to combine with one of the two command and control facilities or form combinations with each other based on their geographical situation.

In 1999/2000 Grampian attended 8,030 incidents. Processing that number of incidents resulted in 12,160 calls from the public to the Brigade's Control Room; a figure some 51 per cent higher than the number of incidents.

Up until 14 March 2001, the Brigade had attended 6,653 incidents in 2000/2001, which generated 13,608 calls from members of the public; a figure some 104 per cent higher than the number of incidents.

The above statistics also do not take into account other tasks and processes which the Fire Brigade Control Room staff normally perform, which include fire alarm system testing – direct line facility testing; processing all non-emergency radio and telephone communications which come directly into the Control Room, as well as processing all out of normal business hours telephone calls made to the Brigade.

Although the Report's proposals offer efficiency savings, these come only at some cost.

The industrial relations unrest that would arise from the substantial opposition by the staff and their representative body is one significant factor. Combination and its perceived adverse or negative connotations are having a very unsettling effect on staff morale. This is an issue which is manifest in the Brigade at present, exacerbated by the recent announcement of the closure of the Scottish Ambulance Service Control Room facility in Aberdeen. The Control Staff representative body, the Fire Brigades Union, has already indicated, locally and nationally, fierce opposition to

any change that threatens their members' position.

With the potential of combination of Control Rooms with other Brigades or indeed other emergency services, comes a potential loss of local supervisory operational control. If the amalgamated Control Centre is located in a different Brigade area, a loss of local knowledge and expertise. From an operational perspective it would not be either an acceptable or workable alternative for Grampian Fire Brigade emergency calls to be handled from another area outside the control and influence of the Firemaster. Conversely, it is considered that it would not be appropriate that Grampian Fire Board be responsible and liable for mobilisation and control of other Brigades resources to incidents outwith the Grampian borders.

The report needs also to be viewed in the context of the recently concluded Public Sector Radio Communications Project, which proposes fundamental infrastructure and frequency changes in the emergency services radio communications networks, resulting in the projected replacement of all emergency services radio communication equipment in Grampian in 2004/2005. The case for retention of a command and control centre in Grampian is strengthened through this fundamental change of communications infrastructure.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

None arising from the development of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising from the development of this report.

'From an operational perspective it would not be either an acceptable or workable alternative for Grampian Fire Brigade emergency calls to be handled from another area outside the control and influence of the Firemaster'

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Fire Board:

1. Actively pursue the retention of the current provision of a dedicated Control Centre to serve the specific local needs of Grampian Fire Brigade.
2. To seek support from other Scottish Fire Brigades in maintaining the principle of locally managed mobilising and control centres.
3. The Firemaster and Clerk of the Fire Board contact other Scottish Fire Brigades to seek their support to retain Fire Brigade command and control facilities under their local control.

MERSEYSIDE FIRE COVER

Evidence backs union fears on AFA responses



**Brigade Secretary
Les Skarratts speaks out**

THE ongoing review of the standards of fire cover has not yet been completed. Assistant General Secretary, Mike Fordham, however, delivered at the Merseyside Trade Union centre on March 7, a progress report of the detailed work so far completed at national level. This report was heard by regional and Brigade officials from both number nine and number five regions.

In short the fire cover review is being undertaken as a consequence of the Audit Commission recommendations (*In the Line of Fire 1995*). The results arising from this review are therefore unsurprising if not predictable. Therefore the Assistant General Secretary's report was not reassuring.

At the close of this informative seminar, Les Skarratts, Merseyside's Brigade Secretary agreed to go on record voicing concerns about a local fire cover review and its consequences for firefighters and the public of Merseyside.

When questioned about his concern, Les replied: "The Chief Fire Officer in his wisdom, on Merseyside has implemented a policy, in which he has reduced the attendances to the actuation of Automatic Fire Alarms down to one pump. One appliance will turn up to that incident without the blue lights or horns. They will be there to investigate the actuation only". According to Les, under these conditions a fire appliance in the Merseyside Brigade is only allowed to respond to this type of emergency call at normal road speed. The only concession to the urgency of the situation is that crews are expected to respond wearing full fire kit.

As all firefighters know, there is a Predetermined Attendance for all emergency calls including Automatic Fire Alarms. There is normally an appropriate PDA for industrial premises or known life risks such as hospitals, aged persons homes and so on. A Predetermined Attendance will normally include two fire appliances and of course can include special appliances such as Foam Tenders, Aerial Appliances, as well as Equipment Tenders.

"The Chief Fire Officer on Merseyside," says Skarratts, "has used risk assessment to greatly reduce the initial speed of response and weight of attack to incidents that have been triggered by AFA". The Chief Fire Officer's risk assessment appears to be supported only by the concept of 'professional judgement'. That the CFO is entitled to make such professional judgements

was the ruling that prevented the Fire Brigades Union from progressing their dispute, in this matter last year. "What we are now saying, continued Les, is that Predetermined Attendances are an Health and Safety issue and that the Chief Fire Officer has a statutory duty to consult the FBU in these matters; so that dispute could be re-enacted again"

Since the introduction of this policy there have been a number of concessions to the concerns of operational crews and officers within the Brigade. These concessions are made only on the strength of representation from station commanders or the managers of certain premises who can provide 'risk based' evidence to show that an increase in the PDA is necessary. It appears that the burden of responsibility has been shifted well down the chain of command, to say the least. Even so, the increased Predetermined Attendance would still be limited to a maximum of two pumping appliances and once again will only proceed at normal road speed.

"This is a flawed system," says Skarratts. "We are demanding a full Predetermined Attendance to all Automatic Fire Alarms."

Meanwhile, Merseyside fire crews continue to respond to AFA actuations at normal road speed even in areas of known social deprivation. In these Areas according to Les Skarratts, "There is a recognised history of arson attacks on buildings and property. There is a high likelihood that any incident could be a serious fire resulting in death and injury, to members of the public or firefighters, which may well be the consequence of this policy. The Chief Fire Officer, if this should happen, could face charges of corporate manslaughter and the FBU would have an interest in pursuing this action".

There appears to be plenty of evidence within Merseyside to indicate that the union's fears are well founded. "Examples of the failure of the Chief Fire Officer's policy were actually recorded in the local media, so they are well within the public domain," said Skarratts. He continued, "There was a fire in some sheltered accommodation, before the Chief Fire Officer increased the attendance from one pump to two pumps. What saved the Chief Fire Officer in this instance, was that the pump that was mobilised to this incident, did not come from the local station. In fact, by pure chance, the appliance that was mobilised was about three to four miles away, when it was directed to the incident. The officer in charge made a decision, in direct contravention of the Chief's policy, to respond at full speed, emergency driving, using blue lights and audible warning devices. On arrival the officer in charge and the crew entered the complex, where smoke was very much in evidence. Looking through

CONTINUED OVER PAGE

SUFFOLK DISPUTE VICTORY

Challenge sick pay cuts now!

Paul Woolstenholmes
Brigade Secretary Suffolk FBU

CAST your minds back to when the 'Grey Book' changes to statutory sick pay came into being. As expected, Fire Authorities took 'may reduce pay' to mean, 'will reduce pay'. This went unchallenged in Suffolk until a point in case arose. A member, who booked sick with stress in the middle of a discipline charge served on him to stop a grievance, had his pay reduced after 12 months. The grievance incidentally was over an unlawful order!

What were the Union doing during that 12 months? Constant approaches to both management and the Fire Authority to have the grievance heard, which would show the original order and discipline to be unlawful, were made.

All this fell on deaf ears. Discipline comes before a grievance – even if that grievance is already being heard and at CFO level.

Secondly, when the member's pay was reduced, after many appeals not to, we sought advice, eventually from the Chief Executive, as to what was considered the right approach to challenge this decision. You must bear in mind that the grievance procedure in Suffolk at this time was not being adhered to in certain cases.

The response from the Chief Executive was that, spookily enough, the grievance procedure was the route to take! A grievance was promptly lodged at CFO level over the reduction of our member's pay. The grievance was heard and the Brigade's

stance was maintained. The grievance was then taken to elected member level.

At the grievance hearing, the panel of elected members found in favour of our member and reinstated his pay – and backdated it six months! Now that raised an interesting idea. We lodged a Brigade dispute on the same issue. Obviously, as the grievance was heard at elected member level, that is where the dispute went.

At that dispute hearing, the case for the Union was put, with management maintaining their stance. That stance being statutory sick pay kept to the maximum after six or 12 months was the exception, not the norm, and 'may reduce pay' meant to the maximum at all times, because they could.

The decision of the panel, with guidance from the employer's side of the NJC, was that the interpretation of that section of the 'Grey Book', as advised to the authority by the CFO and a county personnel officer, was incorrect. The authority said those changes had been misinterpreted! Stunning. The policy is now reversed. Reduction in sick pay after six and 12 months is the exception not the norm.

For all Brigades out there whose 'caring' employers have a similar policy: challenge it now. Don't wait until a member has his/her mortgage lender writing threatening letters about repayments.

In closing I must thank the member involved for his patience while this mess was sorted out and those officials who have been involved with this case. Our member has since had the discipline charge dropped. But that's another story.

EVIDENCE BACKS UNION FEARS ON AFA RESPONSES

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the letterbox of one of the flats, the officer in charge was confronted by a 'fire scenario' and saw a casualty lying on the floor. The door was kicked in and he dragged an old man out, who unfortunately died in hospital. The initial rescue and fire fighting was carried out without back up. We've had another situation where somebody else has died in similar circumstances"

Les went on to recount a serious fire that had occurred at 'The Chapel Brook' public house one morning. In accordance with current policy one pump had responded to a fire alarm at normal road speed. "On arrival the crew was met by an angry mob and if you realise that the station was only three quarters of a mile away, in a straight line, right down the main road, you will know why. Under the previous policy the actuation of a fire alarm by detector or break-glass would have seen the arrival of appliances from the station, within three to four minutes. The employees of 'The Chapel Brook' had to wait between eight and ten minutes, so what started as a small fire, spread well out of control and eventually went through the roof". Surprisingly enough no action was taken against the Brigade. Les could only surmise that the

insurance company thus closing the matter had accepted the Chief Fire Officer's policy rationale.

Paradoxically, as Skarratts points out, the Merseyside Brigade will respond to any 'over the border' (Automatic Fire Alarm) incidents into Greater Manchester or Cheshire by reverting to the previous full PDA using blue lights and audible warning.

The Fire Brigades Union on Merseyside might just be forgiven if they view the famous, "Get out, stay out and call us out!" advice as just a little hollow. The traditional 'belt and braces' approach has now been supplanted through 'fire fighting by hunch', Skarratts explains, "Officers are now advised that if they feel it could be a fire, 'then make it up' that is increase the attendance"

Against the backdrop of a recent ballot with a 68 per cent majority for industrial action the Merseyside Brigade Secretary remained optimistic. "We now have a form of industrial relations," he said. "Under the present Chief Fire Officer there can be nothing but antagonism and dispute but the strength of the membership shows there's nothing we can't overcome. We'll keep enthusiastic and we'll meet the challenge".

Report by Bob Pounder

HEALTH & SAFETY



Lighting a fire under health and safety

Alan Stark
Region 12 Health and Safety Co-ordinator

THE Health and Safety Commission issued a strategy statement *Revitalising Health and Safety* last June. Its aims are to:

- Inject new impetus into Health and Safety agendas.
- Identify new approaches to reduce further accidents and ill health caused by work.
- Ensure that the approach to the regulations remains relevant.
- Gain maximum benefit from links between occupational Health and Safety.

I was only aware of the document via the Fire Brigades Union; I have certainly not been involved in any discussion with Management in the Region.

The forward by Environment Secretary John Prescott says:

"It is time to give a new impetus to Health & Safety at work. Too many deaths still occur at work. Each death or serious injury in the workplace is a tragedy that cause devastation for workers, their families and their loved ones, which perhaps could have been avoided in the first place".

A dynamic statement that I thought would have stimulated much debate with management; unfortunately in my experience this has not been the case.

Due to the lack of discussion on the document and the Executive Council's new position on Health and Safety, it was decided to hold a one-day school at Wray Park (Surrey) to discuss these issues and then feed back outcomes to the Executive Council.

Our new Regional Tutor Rosie Nicola was involved in the syllabus as the day was designed to be activities based, skills workshop.

Applications for the course exceeded the target of 30 but it was refreshing to be oversubscribed and adjustments were made to accommodate all the learners. The learners had differing levels of experience but it was always intended to use the forum as a come and have a look, share your views and experiences and feed them back to the EC.

The principal Health and Safety Inspector also attended to give a view on the strategy, as they were involved in the process.

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

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After the normal introductions the first activity was presented by myself on the Revitalising Strategy and the Ten Strategy Points. There then followed some passionate discussion as to whether the strategy would have an effect on the Health and Safety of the organisation

The strategy of preventing accidents and ill health, rather than dealing with the consequences must be the priority, this is vital. None of the learners were aware of any significant change in their Brigades in this area, although many some of supposed Risk Assessment

Next was an activity 'How to Revitalise Health and Safety – an FBU perspective'. This was in the traditional TUC/FBU style of group work, flip charts and feedback. As expected this stimulated much reasoned debate and highlighted areas such as:

Use of the TUC/FBU Education Programme as this was seen as high quality skills based training, perhaps even joint courses of this nature with management. It was felt that the managers training was competence based and did not involve the skills approach, which was deemed to be important. This would assist in raising the culture as this was seen to be poor in all the Brigades represented. Health and Safety needed to be planned, not the current crisis management, quick fix approach and their lack of vision. Partnership, if it is a true partnership, was seen as an effective way to move forward along with effective management, responsibility and ownership. An excellent session, thanks to Rosie for assisting in the facilitation.

The principal Health and Safety Inspector gave an overview of the strategy and the concept of revitalisation; this again stimulated much debate and thanks must go to Phil for taking the time and making the effort to attend, perhaps a controversial session.

A welcome break for a well deserved lunch and then straight back into a passionate talk by Terry Carter a Safety Rep from Kent. The inspector stayed for the talk and it was nice to notice that notes were taken during the presentation. Terry shared some of his experiences of Health and Safety with the learners, on several occasions his frustrations were quite clear on the lack of

Management of Health and Safety.

The Members' views were also mentioned and the difficulties of their perceived concept of Health and Safety (wrapping them up in cotton wool). The workload of Health and Safety and combining it with his Fire Service duties was also problematic, as was facility time. It never ceases to amaze me that some management's are more than happy for safety reps to use their own time, but not grant them facilities to assist in raising the culture when they are at work. Thanks Terry for a shop floor talk from a rep that had a genuine concern over Health and Safety issues in the Fire Service.

Rosie, assisted by Paul Greenwood (Regional Education Officer), led the next session on TUC/FBU Education, where she spoke of the quality skills based training that was delivered by these organisations. Accreditation, progression and the courses being delivered were all discussed, these courses were seen as fundamental to the skills required by the Union and not some academic professional qualification. Course programmes and application forms were distributed, thanks Rosie for a quality that we now expect from TUC and Trade Union Tutors.

A working tea break whilst Ernie Thornton (EC Member) and myself delivered the Executive Council's Health and Safety Document. The opening quotes were from the document by Dave Patton (National Officer).

"I don't think that there is much argument that Health, Safety and Welfare has slipped down the list of priorities. We must raise the profile and status of Safety, Health and Welfare within the FBU"

Probably some of the words we had been waiting to hear all day, the question was how?

- The whole area of safety must be placed high on the agenda
- The need for a fresh approach
- Sweep away self-regulatory practices
- Enforcement and penalties to be better imposed
- Imprisonment for charges of corporate manslaughter
- Rights for worker to take civil action
- Provisional Improvement Notices
- Roving Safety Reps



Listening to the Health and Safety Inspector



Regional Tutor Rosie Nicola

- Name and shame campaign
- National Sub-Committees
- FBU Database

Thanks Ernie for your wise counsel and despite the time constraints we moved into the last activity. 'Why is Health and Safety not seen as a priority by some Brigades'? As before, a group based activity that stimulated some interesting feedback from the groups.

- Cost was the top of the action points followed by lack of knowledge and awareness.
- Does not form an intrinsic part of day-to-day activities, but is a "bolt on" accessory, treated differently.
- The disappointing macho culture that is still endemic in some senior managements and lack of resources, which leads to a poor culture were all seen as causes.
- Even the not really interested appeared on the report back as well as a lack of responsibility and ownership.

All the points could be identified with personal experience; there was certainly room for significant improvement in prioritising Health & Safety.

As always the end of course discussion and the feedback forms, a worthwhile day that was both informative and enjoyable.

CONCLUSION

To the HSC and the DTR the conclusion was that we were not

convinced that the strategy would make significant improvements. We may have to wait ten years to find out, what will be the moral cost? We hope we are wrong, but have no doubt we will be there to raise the profile of Health and Safety in the Fire Service in all disciplines.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

We like your new strategy and this is a sound platform to Revitalise Health & Safety. The safety reps have the most important role to play in this strategy, we need to train, support and resource our eyes, ears and voices in the workplace. The TUC and FBU deliver quality training with quality tutors, we need to make sure it is accessible to all. The pressures that affect our reps in the constant battle to affect change do have an affect; we need to make sure that the support and resources are adequate. We must ensure that our members are safe at work and their quality of life is maintained when their service is complete. You have all the right ingredients for success they just need to be mixed together.

Thanks to all of the learners who gave their time, I am sure we will REVITALISE, but it may take time. Thanks also to the Regional team that supported and assisted in the day, Rosie Nicola and Phil from the HSE.

Dave Matthews quoted in 1997: "***We must light a fire under Health and Safety***", perhaps now we need to add more fuel.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Consultation on

THE Queen's Speech, which outlined the Government's legislative programme for the current parliamentary session, included the preparation of a draft Health and Safety Bill. This Bill will aim to implement some of the proposals set out in *Revitalising Health and Safety*. However, the Bill itself is unlikely to be introduced during this session. Drafts of different sections of the Bill are likely to be issued for consultation during the year.

The major part of the Bill will not actually be to implement the proposals of *Revitalising Health and Safety*. It will provide powers to make transport operators and employers more responsible for the safety of their workers and the public during travel by rail, air, sea and on the roads by:

- implementing recommendations arising from Lord Cullen's review of rail safety
- tackling alcohol and drug use by safety critical personnel in civil aviation and shipping
- raising port and maritime safety standards
- setting a framework for delivery of the Government's road safety strategy and meeting new road safety targets.

In relation to *Revitalising Health and Safety*, the Bill will implement two of the 44 action points.

It will remove Crown Immunity from statutory enforcement. Crown bodies have always been exempt from or provisions in Health and Safety Law. The HSE currently enforces Health and Safety in Crown bodies by means of non-statutory improvement and prohibition notices

It will provide the Courts with greater sentencing powers for Health and Safety crimes. Respondents to the *Revitalising Health and Safety* consultation document overwhelmingly felt that the current level of penalties is inadequate. It is likely that those offences currently attracting a maximum fine of £5000 in the lower courts will attract a maximum fine of £20,000 and the courts will be given the power to imprison for most Health and Safety offences.

A related action in *Revitalising Health and Safety*, although one that probably will not be ready for inclusion in the Bill, is to introduce more innovative penalties. Proposals that will be considered include:

- Fines linked to the turnover or profit of a company
- Prohibition of Director bonuses for a fixed period
- Suspension of managers without pay
- Suspended sentences pending remedial action
- Compulsory Health and Safety training
- Penalty point system on the drivers' licence model
- Fixed penalty notices for specific offences
- Deferred prohibition notices on welfare issues.

SHOUT/REPORTING.CO.UK



When Health and Safety fails – A workman fell into this sugar silo and was knocked unconscious. Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus went down inside the silo and hauled him out.

new Bill

Another possibility is community service related to Health and Safety.

AMENDMENT OF HASWA

Revitalising Health and Safety includes a commitment for the HSC to consider whether the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974 (HASWA) should be amended. In particular, consideration will be given to ensuring the same protection is provided to all workers, regardless of their employment status. There will also be consideration of how the principles of good management promoted by the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994 approach can be encouraged in other key sectors. In particular, there is felt to be a need to clarify who holds Health and Safety duties in contractual chains.

Another concern is that the framework of the HASWA is not able to deal with the "apparently self-employed", ie those who are self-employed for tax purposes, but whose level of control over working conditions is difficult to distinguish from that of other employees.

The Government will also consider amending the HASWA to enable private prosecutions in England and Wales to proceed without the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is difficult to predict when the proposed amendments will come into force, but after consultation, which has not taken place yet, it will require parliamentary time.

DIRECTORS' RESPONSIBILITIES

The HSC believes that managing Health and Safety is a boardroom issue and that a board member should take direct responsibility for the co-ordination of effort. The HSC is currently consulting on a code of practice on Directors' responsibilities (CD 167: Health and Safety Responsibilities of Directors). This includes the recommendation that "Boards appoint one of their number to be the Health and Safety director". At the earliest, the new code of practice will not appear until the middle of this year.

The HSC will also advise Ministers on how the law would need to be changed to make these responsibilities statutory so that directors are clear what is expected of them. The HSC will not consult on what is likely to be new regulations until consultation on the code is complete. Consequently, legislation is not likely before the end of the year.

CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER

Although *Revitalising Health and Safety* refers to the Law Commission's recommendation that a special offence of

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Title	Details/anticipated details	Current status	Anticipated implementation
Asbestos Worker Protection Directive (83/477/EEC): Proposals for second amendment	Emphasis on better risk assessment for accidental exposure, stricter controls on maintenance and removal, competence of removal contractors and revision of action levels	Formal negotiations in the European and Social Policy Council are expected in the latter part of 2001	Not likely to be implemented within UK legislation for several years
Use of Work Equipment Directive (89/655/EEC): second amendment	This amendment is intended to improve safety of workers when using work equipment to carry out temporary work at height, eg tower scaffolds, ladders etc. It broadly reflects the Construction (Health & Safety Welfare) Regulations 1996, but would affect all areas of work.	Publication is anticipated during the first half of 2001	Likely to be implemented within two years, with a further three-year transitional period.
Machinery Directive (89/392/EEC): third amendment	Current proposals broadly consist of changes to the enforcement regime and new procedures for dealing with dangerous parts of machinery	A draft Directive is expected shortly, but current information suggests that the Directive is unlikely to be published in its final form for two or three years	Any amendment would be implemented by an amendment to the Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations 1992
Dangerous Substances Directive (67/548/EEC): 28th adaptation to technical progress	This adaptation is likely to include the classification/reclassification of some 500 substances, as well as revisions of some test methods	Publication anticipated during 2001	The adaption will be implemented by revisions to the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations (CHIP)
Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive	Proposals include the introduction of exposure action levels, measuring of worker exposure and health surveillance	A unanimous vote on the draft Directive in November 2000 means that formal adoption of the legislation should be imminent	New legislation will need to be made within the UK. Member states will have until 2004 to introduce legislation. Extended transition periods of up to nine years are expected within agriculture and forestry
Marketing and Use Directive (76/769/EEC): 21st and 23rd amendments	The proposed amendments would ban the sale of category 1 and 2 carcinogens, mutagens and reproductive toxicants	The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has the lead on these amendments since they deal with consumer protection	A single piece of legislation is likely, amending the Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety) (Consolidation) Regulations and CHIP legislation

HEALTH AND SAFETY

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corporate killing should be created, it is outside the scope of Health and Safety legislation. The responsibility for this area of legislation is with the Home Office and although the Home Office issued a consultative document *Reforming the Law on Involuntary Manslaughter: the Government's Proposals* in May 2000, the Bill was not included in the Queen's Speech.

AMENDMENT OF RIDDOR

The *Revitalising Health and Safety* action points include a fundamental review of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR). The review will consider whether the information currently collected fulfils the needs of the HSE and local authorities. It will investigate why many employers do not report accidents and near misses. Plans are being made for an integrated call centre, which will enable all employees to report incidents by telephone, fax or the Internet.

At present, the HSC envisages that the revised RIDDOR would come into force in spring/early summer 2003.

TIMESCALE

Several of the action points in *Revitalising Health and Safety* require new legislation. However, much of it will be in the form of Bills, eventually becoming Acts of Parliament, which have to be scrutinised by the Houses of Parliament and which have to compete for legislative time. This is invariably in short supply. This means that most of the proposed legislation will not be coming in to force for some time.

Council bans phone masts

Islington Councillors have voted to ban mobile phone masts from its buildings and land because of fears in the community about the possible health risks. The ban will last for three years, except in exceptional circumstances and where there is no public access. The Council has decided to take a precautionary approach pending future research. Council Leader Steve Hitchins said "The law makes it very difficult for us to refuse planning permission for these masts but as a landlord, on Council owned homes, we do have a choice."

Needlestick law

The US now has a law requiring the use of newer, safer devices to prevent needlestick injuries. These devices automatically retract, cover, or blunt needles immediately after use. The largest US health care union SEIU says that this will save the lives of thousands of health care workers.

The law also requires consistent documentation of all needlestick injuries and consultation with workers about which safer needles are used.

500,000 kids work illegally

NEARLY half a million (485,000) schoolchildren are working illegally, according to a TUC/MORI survey. More than 100,000 schoolchildren admit to playing truant in order to do paid work.

Class Struggles, a survey of 2,500 schoolchildren in England and Wales, reveals nearly half a million children are working illegally. It is against the law for any child under 13 to do any kind of paid work, but the survey shows that one in four – 289,000 – say they do. Thirteen year olds are only allowed to do paid jobs linked to ‘cultural, sporting, artistic or advertising work’ and even then only with a licence from their local authority. But 35 per cent of 13 year olds (196,574) said they were either working during term time or had worked in the last summer holidays. The vast majority worked as baby-sitters or had paper rounds, both of which are illegal.

On top of this, many more children are working longer hours than they are legally allowed to. No-one under 16 is allowed to work before 7am or after 7pm. But almost half (45 per cent) of the working children questioned said they worked after eight at night and 23 per cent said they worked before six in the morning.

The MORI survey of 2,500 schoolchildren shows that illegal school age working has not declined since the last TUC survey four years ago, despite the introduction of the European Young Workers Directive, designed to tighten working time and ensure paid work did not have a negative impact on students’ school work.

The 2001 survey shows:

- one in ten children admitted to playing truant in order to do paid work. Boys are more likely to skive off school for this reason than girls (12 per cent as opposed to 5 per cent).
- one in four children (25 per cent) under 13 admit to doing paid work either during term time or in the summer holidays, even though this is illegal. Just over a third of schoolchildren (36 per cent) do some kind of paid work. The older children are, the more likely they are to have a job. Almost half (44 per cent) 15 and 16 year olds are working.
- children are also working illegal hours. Although, according to the European Young Workers Directive, no-one under 16 is allowed to work before 6am or after 8pm, 45 per cent of children in paid work have worked after 8pm, while almost a quarter (23 per cent) have worked before 6am.
- term-time working negatively affects a significant proportion of schoolchildren – 29 per cent of respondents said they often or sometimes felt too tired to do homework or school work.
- the most common jobs are baby-sitting (37 per cent) and paper rounds (35 per cent), followed by cleaning (19 per cent) and



Start them young – casual agricultural labourers, typically in family groups, harvest spring onions on a large farm in Warwickshire. They are managed by gang masters.

working in a shop (16 per cent). Girls are most likely to have jobs as baby-sitters and boys are most likely to have paper rounds.

- although one in ten (11 per cent) schoolchildren say they earn more than £5 an hour, most are paid much less. Around a third (31.5 per cent) earn £2.50 an hour or less. Nearly one in five (17 per cent) of those working in term time get less than £2 an hour. Although not all of the European Young Workers Directive has been brought into force, some key parts were introduced in June 2000, including:

- children under 16 should not work more than two hours on a school day or 12 hours in any school week

- during school holidays, children under 15 cannot work more than 25 hours a week and 15 year olds have a limit of 35 hours.

According to the TUC poll, 30 per cent or 320,286 children with term time jobs said they did more than two hours a day. One

in ten reported working more than five hours a day.

Local authorities have responsibility for enforcing these rights, but the TUC believes councils are not doing their jobs properly. The TUC would like to see more spot checks in workplaces to ensure unscrupulous employers are not taking advantage of schoolchildren.

TUC General Secretary, John Monks said: "It's fine for kids to earn a bit of extra pocket money with a paper round or Saturday job. But it becomes a real problem if they are missing school and finding they can't keep up with school or homework.

"The law exists to make sure children aren't exploited and the TUC believes teenagers who work can gain a useful insight into working life. But in many cases, neither children or their parents, know what they are allowed to do – and it seems that many employers don't know the law either."

STAKEHOLDER PENSIONS

Good, but it's not enough

STAKEHOLDER pensions, which come into effect in April, are an improvement on the personal pensions which many have been forced to rely on. But unions still want better state and occupational schemes.

The Government hopes to begin plugging a big hole in the UK pensions system. It marks the launch of "stakeholder pensions", which are aimed at the five million or so workers earning between around £10,000 and £20,000 a year who don't have access to an occupational pension scheme and rely on state pensions or costly personal pensions.

Stakeholder pensions are an improved version of personal pensions. But they are also part of the government's strategy to change the current balance between state and private provision. At the moment the state – through the basic state pension and earnings-related pension (SERPS) – accounts for around 60 per cent of pension provision. The government's aim is for private provision – occupational, personal and stakeholder pensions – to increase from its current 40 per cent to 60 per cent.

Its 1998 green paper, *A new contract for welfare: partnership in pensions*, said: "Those who are able should save what they can for their retirement. The government should support those who cannot save and regulate the pension system effectively. The private sector should provide affordable and secure second pensions."

Effectively, then, the government wants the state to provide a basic minimum – a safety net – and top-up pensions will have to come either in the form of occupational pensions or personal or stakeholder pensions.

WHAT IS A STAKEHOLDER PENSION?

These are money-purchase or defined contribution schemes. An individual's pensions contribution is invested in shares, property and other assets to build up a fund which is converted into regular pension payments at retirement.

The size of the fund at retirement will depend on the level of contributions, the number of years of contributions, investment returns, inflation and what annuity rates prevail when the fund is



Pensioners protesting outside Parliament as part of a National Pensioners Convention lobby calling for the raising of the basic state pension and a return to the link with earnings

converted into a pension.

There is no compulsion on employees or employers to contribute to a stakeholder scheme. However, employers have until 8 October 2001 to designate a stakeholder scheme which their employees can join and contribute to through the payroll. If they fail to do this they will face a substantial fine.

Although employers will have the final say on which scheme is designated they have to consult with their employees and their representatives before they make the final decision.

The main exemptions from this are employers with fewer than five employees, those providing an occupational scheme or those contributing at least 3 per cent into a personal pension for their employees.

Stakeholder schemes must be run in the interests of their members either by trustees or by scheme managers authorised by the government's finance watchdog, the Financial Services Authority.

While the government rejected improvements to SERPS on the grounds of cost, it also said that occupational schemes, while generally a very good benefit for some employees, were not necessarily appropriate for new, less stable patterns of employment.

But the National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF), the main body representing occupational pension schemes, rejected this. Its director general, Ann Robinson, commenting on a NAPF-commissioned study of job mobility, said: "The suggestion that during the past 20 years there has been a dramatic change in work patterns from long-term to short-term employment is not borne out by the evidence".

Reactions from unions to the government's proposals were mixed. The complexity of SERPS and Conservative cuts to the

scheme meant that some unions thought that it had had its day. However, industry and services union MSF, for example, argued that SERPS could be retained and reformed and “presented in a much more attractive fashion.”

REVITALISED SERPS

In contrast, the GMB General Union conceded that while “a revitalised SERPS” would be ideal, it recognised that “secure, funded arrangements are likely to be more attractive, more sustainable in the long term and less susceptible to political interference.”

The key issue for the GMB and other unions including public services union UNISON was that any new system had to involve compulsory pension contributions from employers and employees. The GMB suggested a target of 15 per cent of earnings with the employer paying twice as much as employees, while UNISON’s detailed proposals for a final-salary stakeholder arrangement suggested a 10 per cent contribution rate was possible shared between employer and employee.

However, the Government has so far rejected the idea of compulsion beyond requiring employers without occupational schemes to provide access to a stakeholder scheme.

In going for the stakeholder/personal pensions option the government acknowledged that it had to address some major problems with the existing personal pensions system. In the green paper it referred to excessive costs: “Typically these costs can take a quarter of a member’s savings even if the person remains in the scheme for life.” It also conceded that “mis-selling has tainted personal pensions.”

So far over 400,000 people have accepted a total of £3.6 billion in compensation for mis-sold pensions. Over half a million cases are outstanding. The final bill is set to reach over £13 billions.

A key characteristic of the new stakeholder arrangements is that anyone earning up to £30,000 a year will be able to take out a stakeholder pension at the same time as remaining in an occupational pension. Low-cost stakeholder pensions are likely to prove an attractive alternative to schemes for making additional voluntary contributions currently offered to members of occupational pension schemes.

NAPF, which represents many of the UK’s largest occupational schemes, welcomed this development. Its chair, Alan Pickering, who was formerly pensions officer of the EETPU electricians’ union, said it represented “a vital simplification of the system which will significantly increase the prospects of success for stakeholder pensions while avoiding collateral damage to occupational schemes ... it should also ensure that the pensions landscape will not be blotted by another mis-selling debacle.”

The other main benefits of stakeholder pensions compared with personal pensions is their lower cost and greater flexibility. There will be a single charge of no more than 1 per cent of the total fund. This means that in the first year someone paying a 5 per cent contribution on earnings of £18,000 a year would pay £2,700 in pension contributions and £27 in charges.

In contrast, personal pension charges are often very complex

and “front-loaded”. This means that charges would be higher in the early years of the scheme, tying members into the scheme and making it impossible to switch providers without incurring high costs.

Stakeholder schemes will be required to set the minimum contribution that can be made at not more than £20 and allow contributions to be stopped and re-started at any time. Scheme members will also be free to switch to another provider at any time without losing out.

Personal pensions often had minimum regular contributions of £50 a month or minimum single contributions of £500 and members were not free to stop, start or vary their contributions.

STATE TOP-UP

However, there is still some concern about the potential for mis-selling. This is particularly so where those on lower incomes contribute very little to a scheme and get a very small pension. This simply displaces the amount they could have claimed under the minimum income guarantee – the state pensions top-up formerly called income support.

While some unions are trying to make the most of stakeholder pensions (see box) they have not let go of longstanding arguments that the basic state pension needs to be increased in line with average earnings and the best form of second pension is a final-salary occupational pension.

UNION STAKEHOLDER PENSIONS

The AEEU engineering and electrical union was an early advocate of stakeholder-style pensions and got together with the Friends Provident insurance firm to launch the AEEU Group Pension Scheme in the summer of 1998.

The scheme is run by an AEEU-owned company with Friends Provident responsible for managing the investment business. Friends Provident has seconded seven staff to the AEEU company who are pushing the scheme among employers in the industries in which the AEEU organises.

New stakeholder schemes are also on offer from the TUC and broadcasting union BECTU.

The TUC scheme is being run in conjunction with the Prudential pensions and insurance company. The scheme charge is 0.85 per cent of the value of the fund and so below the government’s 1 per cent maximum.

BECTU has long been concerned about the pensions options in the broadcasting industry.

While staff working for major employers are likely to benefit from occupational schemes the casualisation of the industry over the last 20 years has meant many BECTU members have had to rely on personal pensions.

The BECTU scheme is run by Norwich Union and will have a charging structure which starts at 0.85 per cent but then falls as the fund increases in size.

TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS SCULPTURE PROJECT



Sculpture will let you sit next to martyr George Loveless

THE TUC and the trustees of the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum have commissioned a sculpture by award-winning sculptor, Thompson (Tom) Dagnall, to be sited in a prominent position in the grounds of the recently refurbished Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum in Tolpuddle, Dorset. The sculpture will be carved from local stone and it is anticipated that it will be unveiled at this year's Tolpuddle Festival and Rally on 14th-15th July 2001.

The sculpture, which shows a life-size seated figure staring up at the sky, represents the martyr, George Loveless, leaning against a stone slab with chains at his ankles. It is budgeted at £20,000 and the PCS Union (Public and Commercial Services Union) has generously pledged to donate 50 per cent of the cost in memory of the unjust treatment of Union members at GCHQ.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, which re-opened to the public in April 2000, has undergone a major transformation to turn it into an interactive and educational visitor experience. Since its re-opening, visitor numbers have more than doubled. In place of the former clutter and gloom, a bright new interior displays the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs on colourful hanging banners and four iMac interactive touch-screens featuring narrative by actor and TV presenter, Tony Robinson. The story is told through the main characters in four chapters: "Before the Arrest", "The Oath and Betrayal", "Transportation" and "The Homecoming".

The Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum has long been the focus of Union gatherings and a place of pilgrimage for Union members from the UK and around the world.

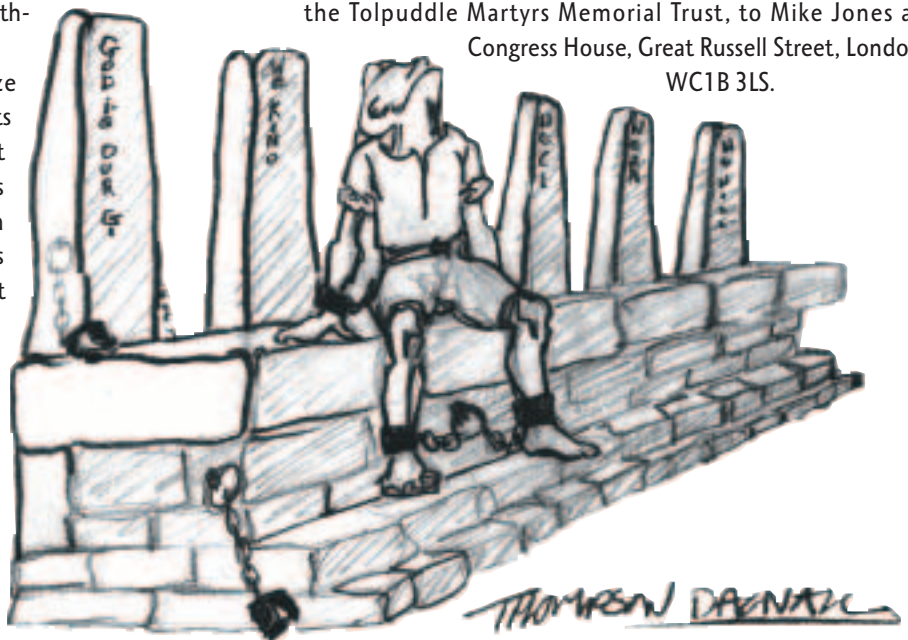
According to Mike Jones, Secretary of the Tolpuddle Trust, "The sculpture will not only be a prominent local landmark marking the entrance to the museum, but it will be a fitting tribute to the appalling treatment of the Martyrs."

The figure representing George Loveless will be seated alone on a dry stone wall or bench. Along the back will be six stone posts, each one engraved with the individual Martyr's names and a line from Loveless' famous poem, "We will be free". Dagnall is hoping that local college students and a local craftsman will help build the wall.

In describing his ideas, Dagnall says, "I thought it was very important for the sculpture to be inclusive rather than exclusive: a piece to draw people forward and into the work." And indeed,

the spaces on the bench next to Loveless invite people to sit and contemplate for a moment what it may have been like to be one of the heroic Martyrs who faced unjust imprisonment and transportation.

■ It is still possible to make a donation to the museum and help towards the cost of the sculpture by sending a cheque, payable to the Tolpuddle Martyrs Memorial Trust, to Mike Jones at Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS.



George Loveless, James Loveless, James Brine, Thomas Standfield, John Standfield and James Hammett were agricultural workers who formed a union in 1834 to bargain for better pay. They were arrested and tried at the Dorchester Assizes, and sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia in appalling conditions. A major public outcry secured their pardons from the King and they returned to England three years later. The London Dorchester Committee bought leases on Essex farms for them. Continuing pressure from landowners forced five of the Martyrs to seek new lives in Canada. Only one, James Hammett, returned to Tolpuddle.

The museum is open summer and winter and admission is free. Opening times: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am to 4pm, Sunday: 11am to 4pm. Closed Mondays and Christmas Day. 01305 848237 ● www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk

Asylum seeker ate my hamster

Ashley Drage
Region 10

HAS everyone read their *Daily Mail* lately? Well, would you believe it, our good old traditional way of life is under threat again! And who is it this time?

We've had a long list of subjects for the rabid, right-wingers to get their teeth into in the past. What with 'devil dogs' (remember them?), munching their way through our kids – obviously dogs don't bite anymore – not according to the press anyway.

Then there were single mothers who either got pregnant to get a council house or had the audacity to be left with the kids by their partners and still expect to feed and clothe them.

NO. There's an election coming up so the boot boys target this time will be "bogus" asylum seekers. So, before some bigot on your Branch starts waving his *Daily Mail* in the air and spits venom over your cheese rolls, let's dispel a few media myths about asylum seekers.

ARE MOST ASYLUM SEEKERS BOGUS?

NO. The Government's own statistics show that 90-95 per cent of claims are reasonable. Of the 46 per cent refused in 1999 only 5-10 per cent were turned down because their claims were "manifestly unfounded".

DO THEY GET HUGE HANDOUTS IN BENEFITS?

NO. Asylum seekers receive only 70 per cent of income support, which makes them the poorest people in the country. The largest part of their benefits is given in vouchers, which can only be used in certain shops.

WILL THEY TAKE OUR JOBS?

NO. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work for the first six months of their claim or while on appeal. Their skills are wasted.

DON'T THEY PUSH UP OUR COUNCIL TAX AND TAKE OUR HOUSING?

NO. Boroughs will be repaid in full by Central Government and asylum seekers cost less than 0.25 per cent of Government

spending. Asylum seekers who are working pay tax too. Lack of housing has been caused by years of cuts and privatisation of council property. It has nothing to do with asylum seekers.

WHY SHOULD WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHER COUNTRIES' PROBLEMS?

Because countries such as ours have grown rich at the expense of most of the world's poorest countries. Since the seventies, world inequality has risen to the highest levels in history. Today the poorest countries owe the richest countries \$2.6 Trillion. Every day they spend \$16 Million to the West. As a prominent debt campaigner argued, "It should come as no surprise that there is instability, economic disintegration and civil wars resulting in a massive displacement of people." These problems are created by countries like Britain. People come here because they really are desperate.

DO WE TAKE MORE THAN OUR FAIR SHARE?

NO. Only 5 per cent of the world's refugees try to come to Western Europe. Britain is ninth in the list of European Countries when it comes to asylum seekers. In fact, more people emigrate from this country each year than try to come in.

BUT AREN'T WE A SOFT TOUCH?

NO. Britain's asylum and immigration laws are some of the toughest in Europe. Asylum seekers are held in detention centres and criminalised. They have no choice as to where they live and are distributed around the country away from people who share their language and experiences. This leaves them isolated and vulnerable to racist attacks.

SO WHY ARE WE LIED TO?

Because politicians love to grab votes by blaming society's problems on the most vulnerable. The people least likely to be able to fight back. Single mothers, the homeless, immigrants and asylum seekers are soft targets. They will exaggerate the numbers and appeal to the most basic of emotions, fear. They will exaggerate the cost of asylum seekers whilst playing down the cost of bombing their countries in the first place. They will encourage arms companies to sell weapons to unstable countries to make a nice profit by encouraging war and suffering and then blame the victims they create.

For centuries, this country has provided a safe haven for people fleeing persecution. Each group has been met with fear and prejudice.

Two hundred years ago, the percentage of ethnic minorities living in London was comparable with London today. Where are these people's descendants now? My own ancestors were French Protestants fleeing persecution in the seventeenth century. My greatgrandfather was an East European Jew fleeing the pogroms at the turn of the century. Your family history may well be the same.

So put down your *Daily Mail* and chill out!

LETTERS**A TRUE STORY**

Dear FireFighter

Davy Butcher died suddenly from a heart attack on 13 March, 2001. Davy was the Branch Chair of Paisley Branch of the FBU. Brother Butcher had served most of his 24 years in Blue watch and latterly in Red watch, he will be sadly missed by his comrades.

Davy had a heart attack in June last year whilst working around the station, he was taken to hospital and remained on the sick until January 2001. He had been told that there was no permanent damage to his heart and that there should be no reason that he could not return to work.

Davy checked with the Union if his name was on the list to be taken down to half wages, as it turns out he was not on the January list. However, he was aware that he would be on the next list. I served on the same shift as Davy and he confided in me that he could not afford to be on half wages (who could?) and that he was worried about returning to duty. He had to decide whether to remain on the sick, to recover and be placed on half wages or to go back to work and hope. Davy went back to work, was scheduled for a BA refresher course, went off sick with a cold and died of a second heart attack on his last day before returning to work.

Whilst no one can say that it was a direct result of returning to work that caused his death, it is fair to say that returning to work did not allow him to fully recover from his first heart attack. It is fair to say that the threat of half wages placed additional stress on Brother Butcher at a time that stress was the last thing that he needed.

If you remember our employers changed our conditions of service in relation to sickness a few years ago, 'a Fire Authority "may" reduce ...' and, yes, most authorities have implemented this and WILL reduce our members to half wages after six months if it is not a service injury. We all said that this diluting of our conditions would result in members returning to work before they are fully recovered due to financial considerations. This may be one example! I am sure there will be others! I for one will never forget that these changes were made by a Labour controlled NJC and implemented in general by Labour controlled Fire Authorities and Boards.

Davy Butcher was a good man, he died aged 42, father of Lee-Anne, David and Mark and best friend of Donna.

Roddy Robertson
Regional Chair – Region 1

THANKS FOR CONDOLENCE

Dear FireFighter

Brother William Robertson was tragically killed whilst travelling to work at Clydebank fire station. Heather Robertson and her family have asked me to express her appreciation to Fire Service personnel from all over the country that have supported the family after the death of her husband. The letters of sympathy and condolence have been much appreciated and have been a source of comfort to Heather and her family.

Strathclyde Fire Brigades Union officials visited Heather prior to Christmas with a cheque for a substantial sum of money. Individuals and stations throughout the country made generous contributions. Many donations contained thoughtful messages of condolence and support. Heather intends to try to respond to the letters of sympathy. Given the number of letters this will take a considerable period of time.

The care and compassion shown by William's comrades in the British Fire Service has been a source of comfort to Heather during this difficult time.

Brother Robertson was a highly respected colleague and his death has been a tragic loss to the Fire Brigades Union and his fellow employees in Strathclyde Fire Brigade.

John McDonald
Brigade Chair

SELBY CRASH

Dear FireFighter

In the wake of the terrible accident at Selby on February 28 in which 13 people died and 70 people were injured, my thoughts and the thoughts of most people were directed to the relatives of the travelling public who sadly lost their lives in this awful tragedy. As the General Secretary of ASLEF, I am also coming to terms with the loss of two ASLEF train drivers.

The media showed in graphic detail the twisted carriages and mangled wreckage created by the unfortunate accident. What I am aware of is the comfort and reassurance that the injured passengers felt when your firefighters arrived on the scene and battled for hours to free them from the wreckage.

I know that I speak for my Executive Committee and the entire ASLEF membership when I express my heartfelt thanks for the tireless efforts of your members involved in this tragic accident.

M D Rix
General Secretary, ASLEF

TRESSSELL VIDEO

Dear FireFighter

I would like to express my thanks to FBU members, through *Firefighter*, for the response to my article in the September issue on Robert Tressell. I have sold more copies of "Robert Tressell's Hastings" to FBU members than through any other Union journal, including eight to "Simmo" in Norbury.

Garry Jones of Plymouth kindly sent me a copy of the September and February issue. I am very impressed and would like to congratulate *Firefighter* as it is also the best Union journal I have read. It has the broadest scope of political articles and is a good read for any trade unionist/socialist who is not in the FBU.

Trevor Hopper

P.S. Copies still available £3.50 each, £6.00 for two payable to T. Hopper at 15a Hartington Road, Brighton, BN2 3LJ. Also, FBU members welcome to the Tressell Event the late May Bank Holiday weekend.

LIABLE FOR ACTIONS OF FELLOW EMPLOYEE

Dear FireFighter

The following is a report of a case which came to trial on behalf of your member on 5 March 2001 at Manchester County Court. It is quite an interesting case in relation to vicarious liability of the actions of fellow employees.

Julie Wood, for Thompsons

Your member was a firefighter employed by Greater Manchester Fire Service. On the 29 April 1998, at approximately 1.30 am, he was asleep in the dormitory at the Fire Station. Another firefighter entered the dormitory with an air horn, which he operated, the air horn gave out a very loud and constant noise. This frightened your member and he immediately noticed ringing in his ears and pain in his chest.

A claim was made against the Fire Service for the negligent actions of the second firefighter in causing the injury by operating the air horn.

Proceedings were commenced in the County Court because no offers were forthcoming and in the Defence, the Fire Service blamed the second firefighter and said that he was acting outside the course of his employment and therefore they could not be responsible for his action.

They in addition alleged that what he did amounted to a prank, again for which they were not responsible. As a result court proceedings commenced against the firefighter who operated the air horn.

The second firefighter obviously then had to seek separate legal advice and filed a Defence. His defence alleged a Station Officer and a Leading Firefighter were aware that he was going to carry out these actions, but did not instruct him not to. In my opinion this reinforced our claim against the Fire Service.

The claim against the second firefighter was therefore abandoned. The Fire Service agreed to pay our costs of pursuing. It has to be noted that the second firefighter will not be out of pocket in relation to legal costs, as these will be met by the Fire Service.

Statements were submitted from Senior Officers, including the Station Officer and the Leading Firefighter to state that they did not know that the firefighter was going to operate the air horn and if they had known, they would have stopped him. There was contradictory evidence with regards to this point.

The case came to trial on 1 and 2 March 2001 and there had been no offers in settlement.

Just prior to the hearing, the Fire Service admitted that they were responsible for the actions of the firefighter, but denied



T H O M P S O N S
S O L I C I T O R S

that the injuries had been caused through his negligence.

Your member had suffered from depression and tinnitus prior to the accident and it was these two injuries that we alleged were exacerbated by the incident in question.

The Judge, having listened to all the evidence, stated that the Fire Service had to realise that the actions of the second firefighter sounding the horn would cause foreseeable injuries and the fact that it was meant to be a joke does not relieve them of liability.

He then turned to whether or not the injuries were caused by the negligence and indicated that this was not straightforward. There were allegations that your member was malingering and they brought witness evidence to suggest that he had complained of tinnitus and depression prior to the incident in question.

The Judge formed the opinion that your member was not a malingerer because he continued to work for 12 days after the incident and told the psychiatrist he was seeing at the beginning of the case that he was feeling and doing better. The Judge stated that if he was trying to fool him then he could have obviously "worked his ticket".

The Judge also had to consider whether the incident amounted to an assault. He had to consider whether the second firefighter was reckless or intended to injure your member. The Judge had to look at the definition of assault and concluded that this was an assault upon your member.

The Judge looked at quantum and found that your member would have had to be retired within two years of the event in any case, because of his previous problems. He awarded a figure of £40,268. Your member was very pleased with the outcome of this case.

Proving that the tinnitus was due to the episode with the air horn was very difficult because tinnitus cannot really be proved by medical evidence. The only way of knowing is what the injured person tells you. The accident report form filled in by the Claimant soon after the incident, confirmed that he was suffering whistling in his right ear. The Judge concluded that this evidence must be true.

FireFighter will not print anonymous letters. If you do not want your personal details to appear with your letter, they may be withheld at the discretion of the editor. But they must be supplied with the letter in the first place

LETTERS

COMPETENT LEGAL SERVICE

Dear FireFighter,

In March 1997 I received an injury on duty and subsequently retired on ill-health grounds without returning to work.

I would like to take this opportunity, through your columns, to thank all staff at Thompsons, especially Nigel Bennet, for bringing my claim to a successful end. It is reassuring knowing we have a competent legal service backing any members. My sincere thanks to Paul Woolstenholmes (Brigade Secretary) for instigating procedures and filling in forms during my incapacitation. Also, personal thanks to Ivan Towns for advice and keeping abreast of things. It gives me an opportunity to emphasise the importance of FBU membership. We know we will need it.

**Ray Wade, OOT Member
Suffolk Fire Brigade**

CHRISTCHURCH BRANCH

I can now confirm that your member's case has now been successfully concluded.

Your member sustained psychiatric injuries and physical injuries to his neck as a result of being involved in a RTA whilst a passenger in a fire appliance.

The psychiatric injuries were far more severe than the physical and resulted in your member being retired on ill health grounds from the Fire Service.

He was considered to be fit for certain types of employment and this was the basis upon which the claim was presented, as a result of which the defendants made an offer of £35,000 plus DSS benefits, which your member was happy to accept.

**G Roberts
for Thompsons**

TUC CALL CENTRES HOTLINE

Still too many bullies

THE hotline set up by the TUC to investigate workplace harassment in Britain's call centres is receiving more than 400 calls a week. The TUC set up the hotline to address what it called the "sweatshop image" of call centres.

More than 400,000 people work in call centres in Britain making it one of the fastest growing industries in the country especially in areas of traditionally high unemployment.

TUC General Secretary, John Monks, said: "These figures show there are still too many centres using bullying tactics to pressurise and intimidate employees."

One of the worst examples was from a call centre where staff were told the person who spent the most time in the toilet would be forced to wear a nappy. The manager of the centre, which has not been identified, made staff sign a "toilet book" to check how long they spent at the toilet.

Another call centre worker phoned the hotline to say staff had to put up their hands for permission to go to the toilet.

Workers also complained regularly that they did not have enough time to rest in between answering calls. One worker was only allowed three seconds in between answering calls, while another was disciplined for allowing a six second gap between calls.

Mr. Monks said the hotline suggested that some call centres were "openly flouting the law" but he acknowledged that other call centres were making better efforts to ensure good conditions prevailed for staff.



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTAGE DIGITAL.CO.UK

Some are better than others – taking calls at the Barclaycall banking call centre in Coventry

The highest proportion of calls came from South Wales (15 per cent) and Scotland (14 per cent) which have a higher concentration of call centres than the rest of the country.

LRD Fact Service

EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNALS

Another reason you're better off in a union

TRADE unions are winning or settling more Employment Tribunal claims than ever before, according to a TUC report. And union-backed cases have a higher success rate than non-union ones.

While 95 per cent of union cases are settled or won at Tribunal, latest figures from the Employment Tribunals Service show nearly a third (29 per cent) of the total cases in Britain are lost. These figures suggest unions can be trusted to take strong cases and that non-union cases fail either because applicants lack union help or because they are given bad advice.

Focus on Employment Tribunals, the TUC's annual Trade Union Trends survey, shows unions simply bringing a claim makes many employers settle and where cases go all the way to Tribunal, 83 per cent are won.

The report also shows unions are winning more in compensation than reported in previous Trends reports. The average award for sex discrimination, between November 1999 and October 2000 – the period covered by the report – was £17,082 – almost double that of the previous year and nearly eight times higher than the average for all cases (including both union and non-union cases).

The report also shows:

- average settlements increased in almost every category of case. Trade union supported cases continue to outperform other Tribunal cases in general. The average figures for unfair dismissal and race discrimination for trade union cases were more than double that across the board. Union unfair dismissal cases collected an average £5,908 compared to £2,515 for all cases. Union race cases won an average £5,047 compared to £2,378.
- over two-thirds of unions (71 per cent) say that simply bringing a claim will make employers more likely to settle.
- union Tribunal cases increased by 21 per cent from 5,157 to

UNIONS WINNING FOR THEIR MEMBERS – AVERAGE SETTLEMENTS

Grounds for claim	2000	1999	1998
Unfair dismissal	£5,908	£4,552	£5,388
Breach of contract	£3,963	£2,957	n/a
Sex discrimination	£17,082	£9,191	£6,905
Disability discrimination	£34,884	£9,650	£1,175
Employment rights wages claims	£3,692	£762	£5,944
Redundancy claims	£4,536	£7,170	£3,304

Data taken from previous Focus on Employment Tribunals reports

6,478. This reflects a general increase in the number of cases (29 per cent) following changes in the law (the reduction in the qualifying period for employees to claim unfair dismissal from two to one year and an increase in compensation ceiling for unfair dismissal to £50,000).

- unions won an estimated £14 million for their members in Employment Tribunal claims.

The survey looks at recent changes to Employment Tribunals. Unions were asked about the impact of costs orders, which the Government is proposing to increase from £500 to £10,000. These costs would be imposed when a party is judged to have acted unreasonably in bringing a claim. Two thirds of the unions (65 per cent) said this would have a negative impact and could deter unions from bringing cases.

TUC General Secretary John Monks said: "Unions continue to win for their members and in many cases are winning more compensation than ever before. And they're also good negotiators – most say simply bringing a claim drives employers to settle. Unions would prefer the number of Tribunal claims to go down not up, but the situation won't change until bad bosses start treating their staff fairly."

"Unions are worried about the impact of the proposed increase in costs orders, which may prevent many from taking claims for fear of a £10,000 fine. People who've been treated unfairly or illegally at work, shouldn't be deterred from making claims against their employer. That's why we're calling on Government to reconsider their plans."

PERCENTAGE OF CLAIMS WON OR SETTLED BY UNIONS

Year	percentage won or settled
November 1999 – October 2000	95%
October 1998 – October 1999	92%
July 1997 – September 1998	77%

Data taken from previous Focus on Employment Tribunals reports

GENERAL ELECTION SPECIAL

A message from the Prime Minister, Tony Blair

"Union members played a major role in 1997 in giving Labour the chance to build a fairer and more prosperous society.

"It was your vote and your hard work in the campaign which helped end 18 years of Tory misrule."

Although there is a massive amount to do to spread prosperity to every family and community in the land, we have achieved a lot together:

- **unemployment is the lowest it's been for 25 years**
- **youth unemployment has been cut by 70%**
- **mortgage rates are almost half the level they reached under the Tories – saving £1,200 for the typical home-owner.**

We've got a lot to do, but we've also got a lot to lose.

We've introduced the **National Minimum Wage** – a goal of our party and the unions for 100 years – to tackle poverty pay. We've given everyone a right to **paid holidays**.

More than a million children have been lifted out of poverty. Five million families have been given a tax cut up to £500 through the **Child Tax Credit**.

All this progress would be under threat from the Tories. They would rip up our plans to deliver real improvements in the future and destroy the solid foundations we have put in place.

They would take the country back to the days of boom and bust – three million out of work, interest rates at 15%, a doubling of the national debt and record home repossessions. They would damage our schools and hospitals and other vital public services by slashing £16 billion off investment.



This is the choice we have:

- **more jobs under Labour or more unemployment under the Tories**
- **investment in our public services or cuts under the Tories**
- **economic stability and lower interest rates under Labour or boom and bust under the Tories.**

It's why your votes, your membership and your support for Labour are just as important this time as they were in 1997. **Your vote will help us to keep building a modern, prosperous and fairer Britain.**

Tony Blair

Fill in this form, cut it out, send it back in an envelope marked FREEPOST Labour Party. DO IT NOW!



Yes, I want to join the Labour Party

About yourself

Please write in block capitals, using a ballpoint pen

1. Surname		2. Forename(s)	
3. Title	4. <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	5. Date of birth	
6. Address			
Postcode			
<small>Your full postcode is essential as we use it to determine which local party you belong to</small>			
7. Home telephone number (incl. STD code)		8. Trade union	

I accept the rules and constitution of the Labour Party. All details I have given are correct.

9. Signature	10. Date
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From time to time, the Labour Party may allow selected organisations to contact you with offers that we consider to be appropriate for our members and supporters. ☐ If you do NOT wish to receive such information, please tick this box

What it costs

Normal rate: (cheque or credit/debit card payment)

☐ £18 standard rate

☐ £7 reduced/trade union rate*

How to pay

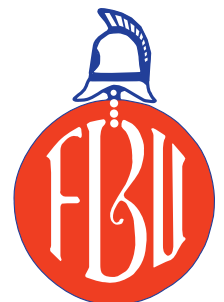
*Delete as necessary: unwaged; student; retired; part-time worker; affiliated trade union member

☐ by Direct Debit **Not only is Direct Debit a convenient way of covering your fee but it will enable us to plan campaigns, safe in the knowledge that we have the funds to see them through**

☐ by MasterCard/VISA/ Switch/Delta: Card no.

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☐ by cheque payable to **The Labour Party**



Building opportunity and prosperity for all

INVESTING FOR THE LONG TERM

Investing in Britain's future to create opportunity and prosperity for all requires a balanced approach – stability the foundation, more investment not less, schools and hospitals first, targeted tax cuts we can afford.

We have rejected Tory boom and bust. Labour has made its choice: to lock in economic stability and strike a balance between long term investment that is prudent and the targeted tax cuts that are affordable, instead of the old mistakes of under-investment and unaffordable tax cuts followed by inflation and recession.

new **Labour**
new **Britain**

FAIRNESS FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Labour is transforming support for families and children. This Budget includes a package to help parents when their child is newly born, measures to tackle poverty and build stronger communities.

- An affordable tax cut, extending the amount of income taxed at the 10p lower rate by £300 helping 25 million taxpayers.
- Children's Tax Credit raised – worth up to £10 a week in April and from April 2002, up to £20 a week as a "baby credit" for families in the year of a child's birth.
- By 2003 maternity pay will be increased from £60 to £100 and the pay period extended from 18 to 26 weeks and the right to 2 weeks paid paternity leave will be introduced. The Sure Start maternity grant will be raised by £200 from April 2002.

BOOSTING PUBLIC SERVICES

The Budget confirms our commitment to public services by investing extra resources in schools and hospitals and recruitment packages for teachers and nurses.

- £1 billion for health, including payments of between £500,000 and £1 million going directly to each acute hospital trust as well as a fund to recruit key health service staff.
- £1 billion for education, with direct payments to schools



(England). Head-teachers of every primary school will receive not £10,000 as planned, but £13,000 with the larger primary schools receiving not £50,000 but £63,000.

- Secondary school direct payments up from £57,000 to £68,000 for smaller schools and from £92,000 to £115,000 for larger schools.
- A £300 million package to tackle crime, including over £200 million to help communities drive out drugs-related crime with direct payments to local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

With one million more people in work under Labour and record vacancies in every region, we have the chance to realise a historic ambition of full employment. So we must go further to make work pay and create new job chances.

- The basic credit in WFTC will be raised by £5 a week in June 2001 further helping to make work pay for 1.1 million families.

BUDGET 2001

- New Deal enhanced and expanded with extra help for lone parents, as well as an increase in the limits for the childcare tax credit.
- National Minimum Wage for over-21s to rise to £4.10 an hour from October this year.

MEETING THE PRODUCTIVITY CHALLENGE

Closing the productivity gap is the key to building a dynamic and enterprising economy with rising living standards for all. This Budget includes a package of measures to help businesses.

- Reducing the administrative and compliance cost burdens placed on small and medium sized firms by the VAT and corporation tax systems.
- Consultation on a new tax credit for community investment, to encourage private investment in enterprise in disadvantaged communities.
- There will be greater flexibilities for Regional Development Agencies to help promote growth and enterprise across all regions of the country.

TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Budget 2001 confirms that Labour is listening to motorists and balancing their needs with environmental concerns.

- 2p cut in ultra low sulphur petrol and a 3p cut in ultra low sulphur diesel from today.
- Major reform of lorry VED from December 2001, bringing UK rates down to among the lowest in Europe for the cleanest lorries.
- A freeze in car and motorcycle VED and an extension of the £55 reduced rate of VED to cars with engines up to 1.5 litres benefiting.

LOCKING IN LONG-TERM STABILITY

Labour's commitment is to stability first – locking in the founda-

tions of stable and steady growth. Only by locking in stability can we invest in the nation's priorities.

- Inflation is forecast to remain close to Government's 2.5 per cent target and the economy is forecast to grow by 2.25 per cent to 2.75 per cent in each of the next three years.
- Inflation and interest rates are at 30-year lows. Mortgages now average £1,200 a year less than under the Tories.
- Under the Tories (1979-1997) growth averaged only 2 per cent. Under Labour it has averaged 2.7 per cent.
- From 1979-1997, 42p in every extra pound spent by Government went to debt and social security, now the figure is only 16p – leaving more than 80p in every pound to go to frontline public services.

WHAT THE BUDGET MEANS FOR YOU

Personal tax and benefit changes over the Parliament mean by October 2001:

- the direct tax burden on a single-earner family on average earnings with two children will be the lowest since 1972 and:
- families with someone in full-time work will have a guaranteed minimum income of at least £225 a week, £11,700 a year.

THE TORY RECIPE FOR BOOM AND BUST

While Labour is proving itself the party of economic competence, the Tories are proving that they still can't be trusted on the economy. In their last Government they gave us 22 broken promises on tax, 3 million unemployed, interest rates of 15 per cent for a whole year, 100,000 homes repossessed, 1,000 businesses going to the wall every week and year on year cuts to schools and hospitals. Now their recipe for unfounded and irresponsible tax cuts and £16 billion cuts to public spending will take us straight back to the boom and bust of the 80s.

APPLICATION FOR A POSTAL VOTE

**please remember to
fill in your postcode**

☒ **Yes, I want to vote**

About yourself

Full name _____

Address on register _____ Postcode

Present address if different from above _____ Postcode

Telephone number (if any) _____

Please give here the address to which your ballot paper should be sent _____ Postcode

☐ My application is for all parliamentary and local government elections for an indefinite period
Alternatively: ☐ I would like my application to be for the election(s) held on: / / (insert date)
Or: ☐ for the period from / / (insert date) to / / (insert date)

Postal votes can be cancelled at any time.

Return the completed application to the electoral registration officer for the constituency in which you are registered.

Your signature _____ Date _____



WAR ON WANT

Palestine: A war waged on all fronts

Last October War on Want launched a medical appeal for Palestine. In January Nick Dearden accompanied two MPs, Richard Burden and Michael Connarty, to Palestine to witness poverty levels and examine possibilities for a solution

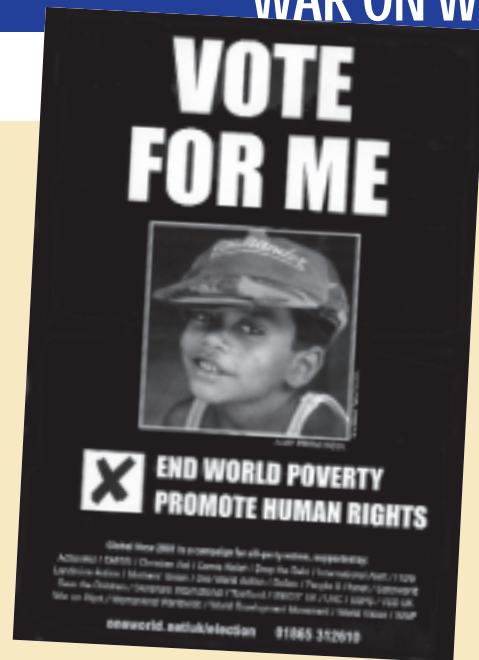


ONE OF the most striking facts of life in Palestine is the difficulty of moving around. Take the Gaza Strip, the poorest section of Palestine, lying to the south-west of the West Bank. Refugees fled here from their villages during the Israeli conquest of 1948 and here they remain, 785,000 of them, most living in shanty-town dilapidated huts with corrugated roofs. Since the Oslo Accords the Gaza Strip has been 'autonomous' Palestinian land, but Israel still controls entry and exit.

To leave, Palestinians must queue up in numbered huts that look like cattle sheds, the majority being refused the right to travel to the rest of their territory, the West Bank. Bear in mind that 20 per cent of employed Palestinians work in Israel and since September, have been virtually unemployed. Unemployment has now reached around 50 per cent in Gaza. In addition goods and services only enter or exit Gaza at the discretion of the Israel Defence Force (IDF).

We saw stall after stall selling strawberries. One seller told us "I am selling these for nothing – one-seventh of their usual price because nothing is allowed to leave Gaza". Even desperately needed medicine and food from humanitarian organisations are repeatedly refused entry.

Ahmed, a 29-year-old agricultural worker from Gaza City, told us: "it was hard enough before. I earned 100NIS (about £17) a day in Israel but since September I have been unemployed because I can't leave. I have a wife and children to support and now we have nothing. Wages are still owed to me but I have no way of getting them."



GLOBAL VIEW 2001

AID agencies and international development groups have joined forces to raise the profile of international development during the general election campaign.

Under the slogan "Global View 2001" 24 charities and campaigns, including War on Want, Oxfam and Drop the Debt, will call on supporters to consider global issues when deciding how to vote. The coalition represents 3 million people – equivalent to 5,000 voters per constituency.

The coalition will lobby political parties and candidates, urging them to make commitments on issues including aid, debt relief, trade, core labour standards and human rights.

It is calling for a promise to put poverty eradication at the heart of international policies and a commitment that all international action should promote gender equality.

The debt campaign has demonstrated that people power can influence a Government. We now need to channel that energy into a wider campaign to ensure international development is a priority for the political parties.

Please join us. If the parties perceive that international development issues are not important at the ballot box, they will give them a low priority between elections.

Election campaign packs are available from War on Want, including window posters and prompt cards to assist voters questioning candidates. For more information contact Rob Cartridge at War on Want on 020 7620 1111 or email rcartridge@waronwant.org

Even in this poorest section of Palestine, Israeli settlements occupy 40 per cent of the best land. They're built on fertile soil which provides access to good quality water.

CONTINUED OVER PAGE

WAR ON WANT

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

The intensive agriculture the settlers practise not only leaves little water for the Palestinian population crowded into the most densely populated strip of land in the world, it also creates chemical waste which, according to children's nutritional clinic Ard El Insan, has left water quality well below safety levels.

This gives some idea of the frustration felt by ordinary Palestinians, which led to the 'Intifada' or 'Uprising' in September.

Since then, restrictions have been increased; current economic blockades are estimated to cost the Palestinian economy \$10m a day.

As an even more direct attack on the development of the Palestinian economy, farmers showed us where Israeli soldiers had cut down hundreds of acres of Palestinian olive trees and date palms, wrecking their livelihood.

Despite the poverty, it's easy to find hope amidst community organisations. We visited a project which offers advice and assistance to women increasingly forced into work in low paid and unregulated employment. Whilst unemployment is so high, the project has re-oriented itself to provide trauma counselling to victims of violence.

We witnessed a hospital trying to make health care free for all, which had already begun a programme of school vaccinations and post-natal medical care. We saw a school which persevered despite pupil's injuries and psychological damage and organised lessons to help children overcome the trauma.

In spite of all obstacles, changes had begun to happen in Palestine. In Gaza, people now have running water, streets are not lined with garbage and healthcare provision is improving.

The Intifada has set much of this work back, but has also demonstrated the serious weaknesses in the peace process. If any peace is to last between Israel and the Palestinians it must face up to the reality of discrimination against Palestinians in every aspect of life; a war waged on all fronts. It must be a just peace which enables people to take control of their lives, free from discrimination, intimidation or the grinding poverty that so badly haunts Palestine.

■ The War on Want Medical Appeal for Palestine is still running. For further details contact Nick Dearden at: 020 7620 1111 or ndearden@waronwant.org

ON THE MOVE?

Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.



F-type prisons: massacres and torture

Bob Pounder
Brigade Secretary, GMC

WEDNESDAY, 22 February, late afternoon, already dark, outside a cold wind is driving the rain into the rush-hour traffic. In the warmth of my office, the door opens, a telephone call is interrupted. Howard Western (Regional Secretary) appears. He informs me that he has invited demonstrators for prisoners' rights in Turkey into the Regional Office.

I leave my desk and follow Howard into the kitchen area. Already members of the IKM are seated round the table, drinking coffee. Hardly any of them can speak English. They are immigrants and asylum seekers who have suffered at the hands of a repressive regime.

One of the comrades, Gurkan is fluent in English. He hands me a leaflet, which explains that the IKM is the Committee for Struggle against Torture through Isolation. Gurkan tells me that the Turkish regime says that its entire people are 'Turkish'. However there are the Kurds and the Arabs (Laz) from the Black Sea region who also make up the population. "We do not say that we are all Turkish, explains Gurkan, but regardless of ethnic or religious background, we are united in our opposition to the policies of the 'fascist' regime."

All the protestors are wearing yellow conspicuity coats that proclaim they are 'Marching to London'. This being the second day of their journey having started from Liverpool the previous day.

Gurkan, along with others had protested against the state massacre of 30 political prisoners last December. This protest had centred on the UK offices of the pro-state Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet*. Further protest had been registered through the occupation of the European Commission in London. Arrests had followed. The IKM aims to arrive in London for 5th March, the day that the protestors appear in Court.

I asked Gurkan about his own experience. He replied that nearly everybody on this march to London had either been in prison or in police custody in Turkey. As I looked round the table each person was introduced as a student, journalist or trade unionist.

Gurkan's offence was that he organised a slide show, using photographs of a 'political nature'. They were in fact old, (legal) newspaper photographs of a May Day demonstration in 1978, which



BOB POWDER

Gurkan and his comrades in the regional office

had ended in the death of 38 people at the hands of the Security Forces. The slide show, which 400 people attended, took place in a local Community Centre. The police had also taken an interest in this event. At the end of the show, the exits were blocked. Gurkan and other co-organisers were arrested and charged with publicising 'communist propaganda' and secondly for "inciting hatred against the state." Gurkan was lucky, after three months in custody he was acquitted by the State Security Court.

Returning to the present situation, it was explained that the IKM had been created to oppose the introduction of F-Type prisons that had been introduced in August 2000. This type of prison regime exists in Turkey, to prevent the free association of political prisoners. In the F-Type prisons one to three prisoners are locked away in isolation cells and can be tortured once or twice a day.

Since 20 October 2000 hundreds of political prisoners have been on a death-fast, with the objective of closing all F-Type prisons. Political prisoners are also demanding an end to what is known as the 'Tripartite Protocol', the collaboration of three Government Ministries involving the prison system. It is apparent that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Security Courts are complicit in the arrest and conviction of political prisoners. The Ministry of Health simply covers up the brutality of the system.

Under Turkish anti-terrorist laws everyone is a suspect. "How can you prove you are not a terrorist?" says Gurkan, those who make trade union demands, even students who protest against university fees, are all seen by the state as 'terrorists'.

Ayfer a member of the IKM contingent had been a journalist in Turkey. She had worked on an art and culture magazine known as 'Tavir' the English title would be 'Attitude'. The magazine had refused to be silent in the face of Government hostility. Tavir featured articles on literature, music and poetry. The end came when support for a 'revolutionary rock group' graced the pages of Tavir. Ayfer was arrested and convicted, others were tortured. Anyone accused of assisting a 'terrorist organisation' can be imprisoned for six years. Membership of a terrorist organisation will lead to 12 years imprisonment.

Political prisoners in Turkish jails have a long history of resistance. Death strikes (a specific form of hunger strike) in pursuit of prisoners demands, resulted in four deaths in 1984 and 12 deaths in 1996. This form of protest had been relatively successful in winning concessions from the Authorities. Gurkan went on to say that the Government, determined to suppress the opposition from political prisoners, launched a propaganda offensive.

The main thrust of this propaganda was that the younger

TURKEY

prisoners were being coerced into participation in the death strikes. Furthermore, the introduction of the F-Type cells was really for the benefit of the prisoner! The Government argued that nobody was dying at the hands of the prison authorities.

The campaign became known ironically enough as 'Operation Return to Life'. The campaign culminated in armed assaults at 16 prisons, which included the use of blast bombs, nerve gas and long-range rifles. Thirty prisoners were killed. After two days, resistance was finally overcome. Every surviving prisoner was tortured and many were raped, before transfer to the F-Type prison. Operation Return to Life unsurprisingly included the force-feeding of political prisoners who were on death strike.

Opposition to the regime comes from all sections of Turkish society. As already stated nobody is above suspicion. Lawyers, doctors and even the leadership of the prison guards' trade union, have been accused of assisting 'illegal terrorists', said Gurkan.

Always at the risk of arrest, TAYAD, the families Association of Political Prisoners, protest through holding a vigil in Galatasaray Square every Saturday.

The continuous abuse of prisoners means that families are often denied the right to visit. At the same time those same families are forced to pay fees to the prison to cover the cost of essentials such as water, electricity and food. Food parcels are no longer allowed. Prisoners with no outside financial support are provided with food that is scarcely edible.

Before the advent of F-Type prisons Gurkan recalled, that as a prisoner himself, he had free association and was able to sift through the food he was given and re-cook it. In the isolation cells there is no such 'luxury'.

The heating system of each cell is under the control of the prison guards, who will turn up the heat in the height of summer. Alternatively the heat can be switched off in the sub-zero temperatures of winter.

In the same cells, prisoners who survived last year's massacre, remain injured, some with bullets still embedded in their bodies. Gurkan says the Government's attitude is simple and brutal, "stop your resistance and we will look after you, otherwise, none".

Deep in its heart the Turkish Government must know that it cannot overcome the resistance of people with a yearning to be free. "You can only be alone in a coffin," Gurkan reflected. "The prisoners in the isolation cells know they are not alone. The political prisoners and organisations like us are determined to continue the struggle till these F-Type prisons are closed down. Even though all political prisoners may lose their lives we will continue this struggle for future generations".

At the end of our meeting I know that Gurkan means this. We shake hands. Howard has given the comrades a large bottle of vodka, a fraternal gift, more importantly we promise our support.

Outside on the busy A57 it is still raining. The IKM are en route for Manchester city centre where they will enjoy an overnight stay, before heading south in the morning.

■ Support: IKM, BM Box 8253, London WC1N 3XX;
IKM london@yahoo.com; dhkc@dhkc.freesevice.co.uk

WESTERN SAHARA

These people need our help

From 1976 until 1991 the Polisario Freedom Movement fought Morocco in the Western Sahara. The Moroccans had decided to invade the area following the withdrawal of Spain. The UN then moved in to try to broker a referendum on the sovereignty of the area – this is the story so far.

THE General Secretary received an invitation from the Polisario, the Western Sahara freedom movement, to attend a conference on the future of their area. Andy couldn't make it and asked me if I'd be prepared to go back to the Sahara as a representative of the Union. I jumped at the chance but it was only when I received the paperwork from Andy that I found out about the possibility of "returning to arms". There's been a longstanding ceasefire between the Saharawi and the Moroccans in the disputed area and now they were talking about going back to war! Does anyone else think Andy knew about this before he asked me to go?

Anyway, armed with a case full of basic medicines supplied by the Scottish Regional Committee, my turban and the big boots to keep the snakes and scorpions at bay, I set off for the conference which was to be held on 27 February, 2001, in one of the refugee camps. Basic medicines are vital to the refugees and all donations, believe me, are more than gratefully accepted.



Camp dispensary: All contributions gratefully received

IN THE CAMPS

All of the refugee camps are situated in South West Algeria and named after towns in the Western Sahara now occupied by the Moroccans. This time I was to stay at El Aiun – named after their capital town and holding some 80,000 refugees; say it slowly, 80,000 refugees. It had also been decided that all of the delegates to the conference would be staying with refugee families in the camp.

These are some of the most welcoming, friendly people I have



The conference?



FBU Branch Sec – El Aaiun

ever met in my life and they also seem to be extremely grateful that people are visiting them in a gesture of support. That said, the conditions they live in are deplorable compared to what we are used to; crowded conditions in all of the tents, hardly any water for hygiene purposes and almost everything they use or need comes in the form of donations. They've been there for over 25 years, I shudder to think what the conditions must have been like in the beginning.

On arrival the delegation was split up into groups and naturally I was lumped in with the Trade Union group. A logical move except that the others were either Spanish or Portuguese whose English was as good as my Spanish or Portuguese.

We were then split up into even smaller groups and our group was looked after by Sidi Mohamed, an Assistant General Secretary of the Polisario Trade Union, UGTSARIO. Sidi Mohamed is a great guy who speaks Arabic, Spanish & French – notice which language is missing again – and works tirelessly for his people and his union.

Despite this obvious language problem we all managed to communicate after a fashion although every discussion seemed to be like a United Nations meeting, but I'll come on to the United Nations later.

I feel that I should take this chance to thank all of my fellow tent-dwellers for their comradeship and hospitality; that includes Sidi, the Spanish and Portuguese brothers & sisters and our family.



Delegation meeting at our house

THE CONFERENCE

I said earlier that the conference was to be held on 27 February; before I went out there I did a little research and discovered that the UN mandate in the area was due to expire on 28 February. Hence the Polisario talking about going back to arms, going back to war.

The conference turned out to be nothing less than a military parade! In the centre of El Aaiun the Polisario paraded, what must have been all of their army, to the cheers of thousands upon thousands of the Saharawi people. These are a peace loving people but it seems that their patience with the UN, and western politics in general, is fast running out.

It is estimated that Morocco has a conscript army of approximately 100,000 while the Polisario can only muster roughly 10,000. Bad odds, but in 15 years of war Morocco could not defeat the Polisario. There were almost 300 hundred international delegates and press at this parade and none of us could find anyone who wanted to go back to war. What they wanted was the west and the UN to provide an alternative which would allow them to go home.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations are in this area with their team, MINURSO, in an attempt to implement the UN resolution which ended the war and brought about the cease-fire between the Saharawi and the

WESTERN SAHARA



Arms captured from the Moroccan army by Polisario

Moroccans. This was in 1991. This whole issue has been going on since 1976 when Morocco invaded Western Sahara, the UN has been involved since 1991 and still there's no resolution.

All that is needed is a referendum of the people in the area. A simple question could be put "Do you want to be Moroccan or Saharawi?" and that would be that. Well it would be if Morocco hadn't shipped hundreds of thousands of her citizens into the area to take part in the referendum. The Saharawi are contesting their right to vote in any referendum but the UN is allowing Morocco the right of appeal on each individual that is rejected from the referendum process. It appears that in an over-zealous attempt to be even-handed the UN is allowing Morocco to stall the process at every turn. Morocco and who else? Who is behind this?

Koffi Annan, UN General Secretary has said that it will now take many years to resolve this situation – if at all. Whisper it, it is now alleged that the UN would like to see Western Sahara as an autonomous region – so far so good – under the control of Morocco!

And I thought we had language problems in our tent.

I'm hoping that Head Office is currently in the process of circulating petition forms to all Branches which call on the UN to carry out the terms of the original resolution and let the Saharawi go back to their homelands.

All members should complete and send these petitions to the UN – the people of the Western Sahara are depending on you.

PROUD TO BE BRITISH?

In 1977 our country sold 30 Howitzer 105mm guns to Morocco and they immediately went into service against the Polisario in the occupied areas. Fortunately, we now have a Government with



UN presence



Made in Britain – the Royal crest on captured armament

an ethical foreign policy whom we believe would never allow such a thing to happen.

In February this year it came to light that the Government granted a licence to Royal Ordnance, now a private company, to "refurbish" these Moroccan weapons. I don't know much about armaments but can you refurbish a weapon that's coming up for 30 years old, or do you renew these weapons? This occurs, apparently, as part of our ethical foreign policy.

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee said in a "Newsnight" interview that refurbishing these weapons was necessary to maintain the military balance in the area. Morocco has an army of 100,00 while the Polisario have 10,000. Military balance? Morocco has a population of roughly 30 million. Western Sahara? About 0.25 million. Military balance?

FUTURE

The Secretary General of UGTSARIO, Mohamed Cheikh, asked me to use the best efforts of the FBU to ensure that their plight is highlighted at both the TUC and the STUC and I've already approached our own General Secretary and the General Secretary of the STUC with this in mind. Mohamed made it clear that without the support of organisations like ours and the international trade union movement – putting pressure on Governments – the UN would probably never move on this issue. We can all be involved in this.

I'll never forget the woman we spoke to, through interpreters, in El Aaiun who said that she "would rather die over the bodies of her dead children in her homeland than continue to raise them as refugees in a foreign country."

We really need to help these people.

25 YEAR BADGES



George Bell, Calton Branch, Strathclyde, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Chair John Coffey



Dave Bennett, Kidsgrove, Staffs, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Brian Moss



Andy Crowhurst receives his 25 year badge from Pete Cooper, Leyton rep



Dave Moore, Tonypandy Branch, South Wales, receives his 25 year badge from Membership Secretary Bro. P John



Martin Davies, Ely Branch, South Wales, receives his 25 year badge from Mark Holley Divisional Chair.



Celebrating 25 years at Leyton, London with EC member Mick Shaw (right): (top row l to r) Peter Blake, Keith Hope, Gerry Court, Jim Davis, Les Cray. (Bottom row l to r) Paul Child, L. Kavanagh and Steve Jefferies



Alec Dick, Calton Branch, Strathclyde receives his 25 year badge from Branch Chair John Coffey



'Gibby' Donnelly, Calton Branch, Strathclyde, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Chair John Coffey



Deri Evans, Mick Clark and Gareth Dyne with their 25 year badges, Bridgend Branch, Region 8



Geoff Hutchings of Bath Fire Station receives his 25 year badge from Avon Officers' Branch Chair Kevin Escott



Duncan Gray, Calton Branch, Strathclyde, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Chair John Coffey



Steve Massam, Croxteth Branch receives his 25 year badge from Region 9 EC member Peter Skinley

25 YEAR BADGES



Ken Moore, Headquarters Branch, Region 9, Cheshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Steve Tottie



Phil O'Callaghan, Croxteth Branch, receives his 25 year badge from Region 9 EC member Peter Skinley



John Preston, Kidsgrove, Staffs, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Brian Moss



William Robb, Stirling Branch receives his 25 year badge from EC member John McGhee



Bernard Slattery, Ely Branch, South Wales, receives his 25 year badge from Divisional Chair Mark Holley



Nigel Taylor, Headquarters Branch Region 9, Cheshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Steve Tottie



Kevin Thomas, Whitchurch Branch, South Wales, receives his 25 year badge from Divisional Chair Mark Holley



Davie Thomson, Calton Branch, Strathclyde, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Chair John Coffey



Dave Batter and Pat Allen of Tarporley Branch receive their 25 year badges from Region 9 Brigade Secretary Steve Tottie



Mike Western, Cowbridge Branch, South Wales, receives his 25 year badge From Membership Secretary Bro. P John



Bob Williams, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Barry Foster as Green Watch look on



Dave Tabner, White Watch, Chelmsford, Essex, receives his 25 year badge from Steve Couch



General Secretary Andy Gilchrist, on a visit to the Channel Tunnel, presents 25 year badges to: Chris Southgate ...



... John Bonwick ...



... Maurice Wood ...



... and Trevor Cornell